Digital Convergence
USP2030

Linking social protection and public employment services (PES) through system interoperability

Country case study:
Republic of Korea

Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI)

DCI is the global initiative for the digital transformation of social protection systems. Established as part of the USP2030 partnership, the DCI is an open and collaborative platform for governments, development partners, civil society organizations and the private sector united by a shared vision: expanding the coverage of social protection and enhancing its delivery through inclusive, interoperable digital systems.

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Acronyms

ALMP	active labour market policy/programme
COMWEL	Korea Workers' Compensation & Welfare Service
DB	database
DCI	Digital Convergence Initiative
EIS	Employment Insurance System
EWPC	Employment Welfare Plus Centre
HRD-Net	Human Resources Development Network
ILO	International Labour Organization
JSA	Job-Seeking Allowance
KEIS	Korea Employment Information Service
KRW	Korean won
MoEL	Ministry of Employment and Labor
MoHW	Ministry of Health and Welfare
MoU	memorandum of understanding
NBLS	National Basic Livelihood Security
NESP	National Employment Support Programme
PES	public employment services
RRN	Resident Registration Number

Executive summary

This case study examines how the Republic of Korea has strengthened coordination between social protection and public employment services (PES) through digital interoperability. It focuses on two main use cases: (1) Connecting income support and labour market reinsertion: Seamless delivery of unemployment insurance and employment services under a unified digital information system, and (2) Supporting social assistance beneficiaries into employment: Leveraging co-located service delivery and digital interoperability.

This case study contributes to a broader analytical report, *Linking Social Protection and Public Employment Services (PES) Through System Interoperability*, produced under the Digital Convergence Initiative (DCI), which examines how digital interoperability between social protection systems and PES can improve service delivery and labour market outcomes.

Use case 1: Connecting income support and labour market reinsertion: Seamless delivery of unemployment insurance and employment services under a unified digital information system

The Republic of Korea links unemployment benefits under the Employment Insurance System (EIS) to active labour market participation through an integrated digital platform. Beneficiaries are required to register as jobseekers, participate in counselling and training, and demonstrate active job search as a condition for receiving benefits. The system is built around the Employment24 platform, which consolidates previously separate employment information systems into a single interface. It includes modules for jobseeker registration, benefit administration, vacancy management, counselling and case management, and participation in training and active labour market programmes (ALMPs). By linking these functions within one system, the platform enables the exchange of information on benefit status, job-search activity, and programme participation, supporting compliance monitoring and coordinated service delivery.

Overall, this approach has strengthened the link between income support and activation measures, while improving the coordination and efficiency of employment services. The requirement to register as a jobseeker as a precondition for receiving unemployment benefits has increased engagement with employment services and facilitated job matching and participation in labour market programmes. The consolidation of services within Employment24 is expected to further enhance accessibility by providing a single entry point for benefit administration, job matching, and activation measures, while reducing administrative burdens through the “once-only” principle and more automated processes. At the same time, the coverage of the EIS has expanded in recent years, although important gaps remain for certain groups, including women, older workers, and those in non-standard forms of employment.

Looking ahead, efforts to expand relevant data exchanges between Employment24 and other relevant information systems will continue while ensuring compliance with data protection legislation. In parallel, the government aims to streamline the use and processing of data from multiple sources and apply data validation frameworks to establish a single source of truth. These improvements are expected to support the delivery of more responsive services for jobseekers and employers, as well as strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based policymaking. In parallel, policy measures aim to expand coverage and complement contributory benefits with non-contributory support.

Use case 2: Supporting social assistance beneficiaries into employment: Leveraging co-located service delivery and digital interoperability

The Republic of Korea supports vulnerable groups through social assistance provided under the National Basic Livelihood Security (NBLS) system, which is linked to employment services through activation requirements. Within this framework, adults aged 18 to 64 without severe disabilities or caregiving responsibilities are classified as conditional beneficiaries and are required to participate in workfare, training, or other employment-related activities to continue receiving support. This establishes a structured link between income support and labour market insertion.

This coordination is underpinned by an integrated digital infrastructure. The Happiness e-Eum system serves as the backbone of the NBLS, enabling automated eligibility checks and supporting follow-up, including through data exchange with Employment24. The Ministry of Health and Welfare (MoHW) uses employment-related data, including insured status from the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MoEL), to assess eligibility, while the MoEL draws on social assistance data to identify and support vulnerable groups in the labour market. In addition, the Bokjiro platform provides a citizen-facing interface for applications and status tracking, facilitating smooth access and transparency.

A distinct feature of the Korean system is the role of Employment Welfare Plus Centres (EWPCs), which serve as local one-stop shops bringing together employment and welfare services. Staff in these centres use Work Plus – an integrated digital case management system that supports eligibility checks and data verification across multiple administrative databases – to enable coordinated case management, including counselling, referrals, and follow-up, and to link beneficiaries to appropriate services and benefits.

Overall, the interoperability of digital systems has significantly improved administrative efficiency and transparency. Automated data exchange has reduced processing times for eligibility determination and enabled more consistent verification of beneficiary information across programmes. At the same time, the co-location of services through the EWPCs and the use of the integrated digital case management system Work Plus has strengthened coordination at the operational level, facilitating the delivery of employment and welfare services in a more user-centred manner. However, despite these improvements in system efficiency and service coordination, labour market outcomes remain limited for many beneficiaries, pointing to the need for more effective and tailored activation measures.

Looking ahead, policy efforts are increasingly focused on addressing these gaps through expanded and more tailored support. The introduction and scaling up of the National Employment Support Programme (NESP) represents a key step in this direction: the programme provides income support combined with personalized employment services for individuals not covered by unemployment insurance or social assistance. It is based on individual action plans developed through counselling, linking beneficiaries to training, work experience, and job placement services, while conditioning benefit receipt on active participation in job-search activities. The programme is integrated within the Employment24 system, allowing both jobseekers and case managers to manage applications, service delivery, and follow-up through a single digital interface.

1 Background

The Republic of Korea has undergone one of the most remarkable economic transformations of the past century. In 1950, it ranked among the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of only USD 854. From the 1960s through the late 1990s, the country achieved an impressive annual growth rate of around 10%, transitioning from an agrarian economy to a highly industrialized, technology-driven nation (Lee 2015). According to the latest data from the World Bank, by 2024 Korea's nominal GDP had reached approximately USD 1.7 trillion, with a per capita income of more than USD 33,000.

As the economy expanded, so too did Korea's social protection system. During the 1970s and 1980s, national policy focused primarily on economic growth, and public welfare programmes were largely limited to contributory forms of social insurance. With continued growth and democratization in the late 1980s, the government began to invest more substantially in welfare and introduced new programmes (Lee 2015). Today, the social protection system is made up of three pillars: (1) social insurance, including unemployment insurance (introduced in 1995); (2) social services, including childcare support; and (3) public aid, including the National Basic Livelihood Security (NBLS) system (introduced in 1999) (▶ Figure 1) (World Bank, n.d. a.).

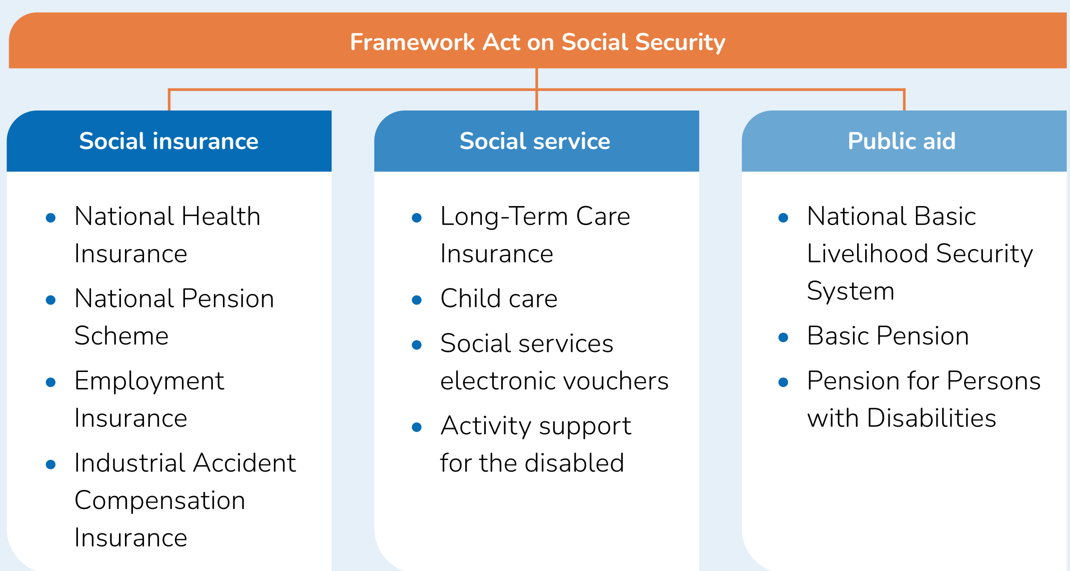

Figure 1. *Overview of the social protection system*

Source: Lee (2015)

Early adopters of unemployment insurance in advanced economies tended to place strong emphasis on income protection. In contrast, the Korean model was conceived as a response to employment displacement resulting from business closures and mass layoffs. From its inception, it incorporated an explicit focus on labour market insertion measures to facilitate re-entry into the labour market, treating these objectives as equally important to the provision of income support (OECD 2023). Accordingly, the Korean approach was designed from the outset to establish a strong and deliberate linkage between unemployment benefits and employment services.

Despite Korea's economic progress, structural challenges persist in the labour market: In 2024, the country's employment rate stood at 63.3%, with an unemployment rate of just 2% (DCI 2025). These figures suggest relatively low open unemployment, but also a labour market operating below its potential. A substantial share of working-age Koreans remains outside the labour force, and employment stability is limited: around half of all workers stay in their jobs for fewer than six years. Non-regular employment, which includes temporary, part-time and atypical jobs (e.g. daily workers, contractors, temporary agency), accounts for about a third of salaried employment, with substantially higher shares among youth, older workers and women. Currently, non-salaried workers (self-employed and unpaid family workers) make up about a quarter of the employed population in Korea (OECD 2023).

These structural weaknesses increase the risk of income insecurity and make certain groups particularly reliant on welfare support. Among those facing higher vulnerability are people with disabilities, young unemployed or inactive individuals, low-educated workers, older persons, and women taking a career break, many of whom have care responsibilities that limit their labour market participation (OECD 2024).

With the fastest-ageing population among OECD countries, mobilizing people into productive employment has become a critical policy priority for Korea (OECD 2023). Korea's fertility rate has dropped to 0.72 while the population continues to age at a rapid pace (DCI 2025), shrinking the domestic labour force and increasing the dependency ratio. Sustaining economic growth and sustainable financing of the social protection system in this context will depend on improving labour market participation, especially among women, older persons, and other underrepresented groups.

Building on lessons from the years preceding and during the pandemic, the Korean government has launched a reform process to simultaneously strengthen contributory and non-contributory income support for unemployed persons and labour market insertion measures to keep displaced workers connected to the labour market and to mobilize the inactive population to sustain the labour supply and economic growth in the years ahead. Against this background, this country case study presents two use cases that illustrate how institutional collaboration between ministries and agencies in the fields of social protection and employment policy has supported these reform efforts, underpinned by enhanced digital interoperability.

2 Connecting income support and labour market reinsertion: Seamless delivery of unemployment insurance and employment services under a unified digital information system

2.1 Introduction

The Republic of Korea introduced its **Employment Insurance System (EIS) [고용보험]** in 1995. The EIS combines a traditional unemployment benefits programme with a range of active labour market policies (ALMPs) designed to prevent unemployment and promote re-employment. For this reason, Korea refers to it as “employment insurance” rather than “unemployment insurance” (Yoo n.d.). The EIS is based on contributions and includes unemployment benefits, maternity and parental leave benefits, job retention programmes, re-employment programmes, vocational training and skill development programmes (ILO 2024).

The system covers most wage workers under the Labour Standards Act, with some exceptions such as short-term daily workers and certain categories of agricultural labourers. Since the early 2000s, coverage has gradually expanded, including voluntary enrolment for the self-employed and, more recently, special types of workers such as platform workers (ILO 2021).

Under the EIS, two main types of unemployment benefits are offered (World Bank, n.d.b):

- The Job-Seeking Allowance (JSA) [구직급여] provides income replacement during periods of unemployment, helping to maintain workers' living standards and support their reintegration into employment. The benefit is neither means-tested nor taxable. Eligibility requires 180 days of contributions within the preceding 18 months. The allowance amounts to 60% of the insured worker's average daily earnings during the three months prior to unemployment, subject to a minimum of 80% of the statutory minimum wage and an established ceiling. The benefit duration depends on both the insured period and the claimant's age, ranging from 120 to 270 days. Extended benefits may be granted in specific situations: up to two years for participation in vocational training recommended by the job centre; up to 60 additional days for individuals facing particular difficulties in finding re-employment and in need of continued support; and up to 60 additional days during periods of adverse labour market conditions, such as a significant rise in the unemployment rate.

- In addition, the system provides several Employment Promotion Allowances [취업촉진수당], designed to shorten unemployment spells and support rapid reintegration. These include: (1) the Early Re-employment Allowance, paid if the claimant finds a new job before using up half of the entitlement period and stays employed for at least one year; (2) the Vocational Skills Development Allowance, which covers costs such as transport and meals for those attending training designated by the job centre; (3) the Wide-area Job-Seeking Allowance, which reimburses expenses for job search activities outside the claimant's area of residence; and (4) the Moving Allowance, which covers relocation costs when moving to take up employment or training.

The EIS is funded through mandatory contributions from both employers and employees. Employees contribute 0.9% of their gross annual wages, while employers contribute 0.9% toward unemployment insurance, plus an additional 0.25% to 0.85% of their total annual payroll for skills development, depending on the type of business and its associated risk category. Participation by the self-employed is voluntary, with a contribution rate of 2.25% of declared income (Asenjo and Pignatti 2019).

Approximately 15.6 million wage-employed workers are currently insured with the EIS, and 1.8 million received unemployment benefits in 2024. Since 2006, self-employed persons have been able to join the scheme on a voluntary basis (with about 53,000 insured in 2025). In response to the labour-market disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Korea began expanding the scheme to non-standard workers, including artists (from December 2020), specific occupational categories (from July 2021), and platform workers (from January 2022). These groups accounted for approximately 1.8 million insured persons in 2023 (DCI 2025).

A distinctive design feature of the EIS is the tight coupling of unemployment benefits with ALMPs. Claimants must demonstrate active job search and attend training or counselling as required. This is operationalized through an integrated approach, with regular reporting and compliance monitoring, ensuring that the EIS functions not only as a safety net, but also as a mechanism for labour market insertion. The scheme is managed via the Employment24 platform (▶ see Box 1)

Box 1. Employment24 – Korea's Integrated Employment Service Platform[1]

In 2023, the Korea Employment Information Service (KEIS) – a public institution under the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MoEL) responsible for developing and managing Korea's employment information systems – launched Employment24 [고용24]. This integrated platform for employment services consolidates over 700 data connections across nearly all ministries and public agencies, enabling real-time information exchange and more efficient, responsive service delivery.

Through Employment24, individuals seeking employment can apply for, track, and manage employment-related and other relevant public services anytime and anywhere. For these purposes, the platform integrates the core functions of nine previously separate employment information systems, including:

- The WorkNet platform, which provides jobseekers with job postings, and recruiting employers with candidate profiles; it also makes use of new digital technologies such as AI and big data
- The Human Resource Development (HRD)-Net, which provides vocational training and education programmes for self-directed job skills development
- The Employment Insurance benefits portal, which provides reporting and allowance application services for unemployment benefits, maternity protection, employment stability, employment retention, etc.; the system also provides eligibility prechecks for unemployment benefits and pre-estimation of benefits
- The portal of the National Employment Support Programme (NESP), which provides comprehensive employment and livelihood support services for disadvantaged groups,[2] thereby assisting in their job-seeking endeavours and stabilizing their livelihoods (▶ see Box 5)

In addition to the client-facing interface, Employment24 offers administrators a consolidated back-office system that brings together each claimant's history, covering benefit status, training enrolments, and records of previous job search activities. This integrated view enables caseworkers to monitor compliance more effectively, apply warnings or sanctions where necessary, and coordinate referrals to income support, training opportunities or job placements in a timely and consistent manner.

The system also enables cross-checks with a large number of external databases, including the Happiness e-Eum Social Security Information System (사회보장정보시스템) run by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MoHW) (▶ see Box 3).

1 Based on KEIS (2024).

2 Low-income individuals seeking jobs, unemployed youth, women returning to the workforce after career breaks, etc.

2.2 Institutional arrangements

Policy oversight of the unemployment insurance lies with the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MoEL). The MoEL sets contribution rates, benefit levels, and labour market insertion measures under the Employment Insurance Act (see below). The actual fund administration for the EIS is handled by the Korea Workers' Compensation & Welfare Service (COMWEL) under MoEL supervision. COMWEL administers the registration of employees and the collection of contributions, in addition to making decisions on compensation, benefits and payments (ILO 2024). Meanwhile, KEIS develops and maintains the underlying information system, Employment24 (▶ see Box 1). KEIS also provides labour market information and AI-based matching tools to enhance service delivery.

Control of the EIS is ensured through the Employment Insurance Committee, a tripartite governance body composed of representatives of employees, employers, the government, and public interest experts. The Committee is responsible for reviewing and advising on improvements to the insurance system and its programmes, determining contribution rates in accordance with the Insurance Premium Collection Act, and evaluating the performance and effectiveness of insurance operations.

At the de-central level, frontline staff at State Job Centres and Employment Welfare Plus Centres (EWPCs) (▶ see Box 2) operated by the MoEL in cooperation with local governments act as both benefit officers and career counsellors, ensuring that when a person applies for unemployment benefits, they are immediately guided into re-employment activities, including counselling, job search support and training. The governance structure, thus, directly intertwines the social protection function (income support) with employment service functions (placement, training), under a unified administrative umbrella (OECD 2024).

Box 2. Integrated service delivery and case management through the Employment Welfare Plus Centres (EWPCs)[3]

A key institutional innovation to strengthen coordination between social protection and employment services in Korea has been the establishment of the Employment Welfare Plus Centres [고용복지+센터]. These are co-located offices where State Job Centres and local welfare offices under municipal governments and the Ministry of Health and Welfare work side by side. They were introduced to overcome the fragmentation of service delivery, which previously forced citizens to visit multiple offices for different

3 Based on MoEL (2024), OECD (2024) and World Bank (n.d.a)

types of support. By bringing services together under one roof, the centres make it possible for unemployed people and low-income households to access unemployment benefits, employment counselling and placement, referral to relevant ALMPs, and basic livelihood assistance (▶ see Section 3) in a single location.

The institutions participating in EWPCs carry out their respective tasks individually, but aim to collaborate to solve the problems of individuals facing complex and intricate situations. For such cases, the staff of different organizations build case management consultive groups to discuss the support they deliver.

EWPCs are structured into employment services, welfare support services and micro finance support:

- Most **employment services** are provided by Employment Centre staff under the MoEL, who deliver customized employment support, e.g. job counselling and referring jobseekers to ALMPs. Employment Centre staff are available to support all jobseekers, irrespective of age and labour market barriers. In addition, staff from other organizations, including non-government organizations (NGOs), provide services and ALMPs to groups with labour market vulnerabilities.

- **Welfare support** is typically provided by staff from local governments. Services include welfare counselling, the possibility to submit applications for public welfare benefits (▶ see Section 3), referral to private welfare services and dedicated case management.

- Finally, support with **personal finances** is provided by the EWPC's Financial Centre, which provides assistance to people with financial difficulties and low credit ratings.

The network has expanded rapidly: Today, more than 100 of the 174 Employment Centres operate as EWPCs. Since 2023, some of these centres have been upgraded into an Integrated Network of Employment Services, broadening their scope to also include financial counselling and mental health services, in addition to traditional labour market and welfare support.

This evolution has been supported by enhanced information sharing between the relevant government information systems through a **dedicated data exchange platform, called Work Plus**. The system serves both, users and service providers of the EWPCs. Jobseekers can access job information and learn about announcements from their local EWPC. Service providers can manage cases and refer them to other participating agencies.

As shown in ▶ Table 1, Work Plus provides relevant data from standard employment services databases (Employment24, Local Job Database, a women's re-employment database, and a veterans employment database), along with individual-level welfare benefit histories and economic statuses from Happiness e-Eum (the local welfare database), the Microfinance Database (DB), and the Self-Sufficiency DB to facilitate integrated case management. In practice, Work Plus accesses relevant service-history and benefit data from these information systems so that caseworkers see both welfare and employment histories when assessing a client.

A **two-way referral function** has been introduced, enabling staff to electronically refer clients to counterpart services: for example, a welfare caseworker can refer a household member to employment services, while an employment counsellor can trigger an electronic referral for a jobseeker to apply for livelihood assistance. This functionality reduces duplication, shortens processing times, and ensures that citizens are seamlessly guided across institutional boundaries. Workers across welfare and employment services can also use the **messaging platform provided by Work Plus** to effectively communicate with each other via chat.

Work Plus is used during initial consultation, referral, and monitoring. The case management process is described in more detail in ▶ Box 4. However, job-related information is mainly provided by Employment24 (▶ see Box 1), and welfare-related information is mainly provided by the Happiness e-Eum system (▶ see Box 3).

Table 1. Information systems integrated in Work Plus

Type of service	Agency	Information system	Goal
Employment service	Ministry of Employment and Labor	Employment24 (▶ see Box 1)	Provide key services such as job matching, vocational training, and unemployment benefits for jobseekers and employers
	Municipality government	Local Job DB	Provide information on regional job openings
	Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs	Veterans Employment Information Network	Provide information on job openings and training opportunities for veterans
	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family	Saeil (Women's Re-employment)	Provide information on job openings and training opportunities for women out of the labour force

Welfare or finance service	Ministry of Health and Welfare	Happiness e-Eum (▶ see Box 3)	Provide welfare programme benefit status and eligibility information
	Ministry of Health and Welfare	Self-Sufficiency DB	Provide benefit status and eligibility information for supplemental income programmes
	Korea Inclusive Finance Agency	Microfinance DB	Provide microcredit with low interest rates to startups and small businesses

Source: World Bank (n.d.a)

2.3 Legal framework

The Employment Insurance Act [고용보험법] of 1995 provides the statutory basis for unemployment benefits. Article 40 stipulates that benefits are payable only to insured employees who are capable of and available for work, have lost employment involuntarily, and are actively seeking new employment. The Act empowers the MoEL to suspend or terminate benefits if these conditions are not met.

Implementing regulations, notably the Unemployment Recognition and Reemployment Support Regulation (2019), specify the monitoring regime. Claimants must report at regular intervals, usually every two to four weeks, to demonstrate job search. Acceptable activities include applications, interviews, attendance at job fairs, and enrolment in training. Failure to comply without just cause, such as refusing a suitable offer, results in suspension of the benefit for that period.

The legal framework also provides for integration with training programmes: the Employment Insurance Fund finances vocational training for unemployed workers under the Vocational Skills Development Act, and unemployed individuals may receive training allowances or cost subsidies while receiving benefits, on the condition that the training is part of their re-employment plan.

The Employment Insurance Act and related privacy laws (e.g. the Personal Information Protection Act) authorize employment offices to use digital systems to verify eligibility and compliance. This includes cross-checking a claimant's status against other databases, for example, social insurance or income tax data.

2.4 Operational workflow[4]

The operational workflow is as follows.

Step 1
Eligibility check

The JSA claimant first requests the former employer/firm to file the required separation documents with COMWEL. The system then performs a preliminary eligibility check. Eligibility requires involuntary separation and an insured period threshold (▶ see Section 2.1). Each individual is identified through their Resident Registration Number (RRN) [주민등록번호],[5] which serves as a unique personal identifier across Korea's employment and social protection systems.

Step 2
Registration with Employment24

In parallel, the claimant registers as a jobseeker with Employment24 (▶ see Box 1), completes the mandatory pre-orientation on the unemployment benefit scheme (online or, if needed, on site), and submits the application for recognition of benefit eligibility at the competent Employment Centre.[6]

Step 3
Participation in and recognition of re-employment activities

Once recognized, the claimant undertakes re-employment activities (applications, interviews, job fairs, skills courses, vocational training) and enters a cycle of unemployment recognition every 1 to 4 weeks. Except for specific rounds (and for repeat or long-term claimants subject to stricter standards), recognition can be completed online via Employment24.

Step 4
Monitoring compliance with re-employment activities

Employment counsellors review the claimant's activities at each reporting interval. They may suggest new job opportunities, refer claimants to training, or assign them to mandatory workshops. If the claimant's efforts are deemed satisfactory, the next benefit instalment is paid to the designated bank account the day after recognition. If not, payment is suspended for that period. Claimants must demonstrate active and genuine job search. False activities lead to non-payment for the relevant recognition period, and repeated violations can trigger suspension for the entire remaining entitlement.

Step 5
Re-employment

When a person receiving the JSA starts a new job, the employer reports the new employee's insurance registration to COMWEL. Employment24 receives this information automatically through its data linkages and flags the record as "re-employed". However, the beneficiary must also submit a re-employment report, either online or in person, within two months of starting the job. Benefits are paid up to the day before re-employment.

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4 Based on https://www.work24.go.kr/cm/c/f/1100/selecSystInfo.do?currentPageNo=1&recordCountPerPage=9&upprSystClId=&systClId=SC00000256&systId=SI00000412.

5 The RRN is a 13-digit unique identification number issued by the Government. This number is widely used for various administrative and legal purposes, such as identification, taxation, healthcare, and social services including welfare programmes and school enrolments. The number is structured including the date of birth, biological gender at birth, along with a randomly generated unique sequence of digits (World Bank n.d. a).

6 In principle, one in-person visit is required; in disaster situations, online substitution is permissible at the Centre's discretion.

2.5 Key elements of digital interoperability

Throughout the process, Employment24 (▶ see Box 1) functions as an integrated information platform that centralizes all data and services required for managing unemployment benefits and re-employment support. The system automatically synchronizes job applications, records training participation, and facilitates access to complementary services such as career development programmes, online vocational aptitude tests, and the National Tomorrow Learning Card (국민내일배움카드), which subsidizes training costs. Job search activities conducted outside the platform, such as interviews or applications made directly to employers, must be documented and uploaded to the system with appropriate supporting evidence.

Claimants can also record and submit proof of their job-search efforts using the mobile application "Job Diary" [취업드림수첩], which is fully integrated with their Employment24 profile. It can be accessed safely and conveniently using biometric authentication, such as fingerprint recognition, and provides location-based services that help users identify nearby employment opportunities and relevant support offices. By enabling push notifications, claimants can also receive personalized guidance and reminders without having to log in each time.[7]

For caseworkers, Employment24 provides an integrated dashboard to review each claimant's activity and determine compliance. When a claimant finds employment, the system detects this through integration with social insurance databases and triggers automatic suspension of benefits.

Beyond the integration of previously separate information systems into a single platform, Employment24 is built on a robust architecture comprising more than 700 data connections with multiple ministries and public agencies, enabling real-time data exchange across disparate systems. At a technical level, the architecture depends on a centralized service bus or integration layer, which routes data between source systems and the Employment24 portal. Each connected agency exposes tightly specified APIs or data feeds, aligned with standard data formats and protocols and secured with national identity and encryption frameworks.

7 Based on https://www.korea.kr/news/policyNewsView.do?newsId=148931028&utm.

2.6 Critical success factors and remaining challenges

Several factors have contributed to the successful integration of unemployment benefits and labour market reinsertion measures:

- **Strong strategic leadership** has played a crucial role in driving the integration of employment and social protection services. The initiative was championed by a leading social protection expert and professor at Seoul National University, who later served as adviser to the President of Korea. His vision of providing more accessible, integrated services for people facing difficulties in finding employment helped shape the conception and political prioritization of the EWPCs and the Employment24 platform.

- The Employment24 platform builds on earlier digital reforms and **unifies previously separate information systems under a single integrated platform**. Whereas services for the unemployed had long operated through several distinct but well-developed digital systems, these have now been merged into one integrated system hosted on a central server. This shift replaced fragmented silos with shared infrastructure, enabling smooth interoperability across services.

- Externally, the Employment24 platform is **connected to more than 700 data interfaces** spanning nearly all ministries and public agencies, enabling the real-time exchange of information that supports faster, more accurate, and better-coordinated service delivery.

- The platform aims to apply the **"once-only" principle**, whereby citizens provide their data only once and authorized institutions reuse it securely. This approach reduces the administrative burden for users, while promoting efficiency and consistency in service delivery.

- **Digital interoperability is accompanied by institutional co-location**. The EWPCs operate under unified procedures and in shared facilities, allowing jobseekers to access employment, training, and welfare services seamlessly.

Several challenges remain that need to be addressed over the coming years to achieve better results:

- Although Employment24 already enables extensive data sharing across government systems, **further expansion of data exchanges and stronger alignment with privacy and data-protection standards remain necessary**. Existing gaps still result in some duplication of data collection and constrain the full automation of processes (OECD 2024).

- Korea's **strong reliance on centralized government data infrastructure** was exposed in September 2025, when a fire at the National Information Resources Service (NIRS) data centre caused the shutdown of more than 600 government IT systems across ministries and public agencies. The incident temporarily disabled around 700 online services, including key platforms for labour inspection and employment administration. Recovery took several weeks, with some services reverting to manual, paper-based operations during the outage. Notably, Employment24 remained fully operational throughout the crisis, thanks to its independent server infrastructure managed by KEIS. However, the disruption highlighted significant vulnerabilities and underscored the urgent need to strengthen the resilience of its digital infrastructure to safeguard the continuity of essential social protection and employment services in future emergencies.

2.7 Results of the approach

The requirement to register as a jobseeker – previously through WorkNet and, since September 2024, through the integrated Employment24 platform – as a pre-condition for receiving unemployment benefits and participating in labour market programmes has led to an increase in the number of registered jobseekers in Korea. In 2023, these measures resulted in 408,155 job placements facilitated through WorkNet (now integrated in Employment24) (World Bank, n.d.a).

Employment24 was launched only in 2024, and systematic evidence on its effects on employment outcomes is not yet available. However, based on its design features and experience in early implementation, the integrated platform, which manages unemployment benefits and re-employment activities within one digital system, is expected to generate important efficiency and access gains. By consolidating previously separate employment-related services into a single digital entry point, Employment24 enables users to access a one-stop service without navigating multiple websites or administrative channels. The "once-only" principle reduces the need for repeated data entry and the submission of duplicate documents (KEIS 2024). For the public employment services (PES) staff, the integrated system enables faster administrative processes and more automation (OECD 2024).

Overall, coverage of the EIS, including unemployment insurance, among individuals actively participating in the labour market has improved in recent years. As shown in ▶ Table 2, significant gains were recorded between 2014 and 2020 across several categories of workers. Administrative data further indicate a substantial rise in the share of registered unemployed receiving unemployment insurance benefits, increasing from approximately 37% in 2018 to 71% in 2022.

Despite this progress, overall coverage of the EIS remains relatively low, reaching only about 57% of all workers in 2020. Coverage gaps persist for specific groups, notably women (around 61%) and workers aged 50 and above (approximately 52%) (OECD 2023).

These numbers reveal that large segments of the workforce remain outside the coverage of EIS, including most small business owners, workers in non-standard forms of employment, and freelancers. Coverage gaps also affect young labour market entrants and women with interrupted career trajectories.

Table 2. Distribution of workers with and without employment insurance as a percentage of employed people (%)

		With employment insurance		Without employment insurance				
		Wage workers	Non-wage workers	Wage workers	Non-wage workers			
					Employer		Self-employed	Unpaid family workers
					Firms with 5 or more employees	Firms with less than 5 employees		
Total	2014 2020	54.7 61.9	2.4 3.1	19.2 14.5	0.9 0.5	4.3 3.3	13.9 13.2	4.7 3.6
Men	2014 2020	56.5 63.5	2.9 3.9	16.7 11.8	1.2 0.6	5.1 4.2	16.1 15.2	1.5 1.0
Women	2014 2020	51.8 59.5	1.7 1.9	23.1 18.6	0.3 0.4	3.2 1.9	10.6 10.3	9.4 7.5

Source: OECD (2023)

While initial efforts have been made to address these blind spots by extending the EIS (▶ see Section 2.1), the government has also introduced additional measures to expand non-contributory income support for unemployed individuals who do not qualify for unemployment insurance benefits and to link this support to incentives for active participation in the labour market. These measures are discussed in ▶ Section 3.

2.8 Way forward

Looking ahead, the MoEL and KEIS will continue efforts to establish additional, relevant data exchanges, while seeking solutions that ensure compliance with data protection legislation. In parallel, they aim to streamline the use and processing of data from multiple sources and to apply data validity frameworks to establish a single source of truth. These improved data exchanges are expected to support both the delivery of smarter services for jobseekers and employers and stronger monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based policymaking (OECD 2024).

3 Supporting social assistance beneficiaries into employment: Leveraging co-located service delivery and digital interoperability

3.1 Introduction

The National Basic Livelihood Security (NBLS) system is the Republic of Korea's flagship social assistance programme, consisting of various sub-schemes. It was introduced in 2000 under the National Basic Livelihood Security Act (1999) as the first legal guarantee of a minimum living standard for low-income households. The programme is financed by general taxation, with the central government bearing around 80% of the cost (and 50% in wealthier municipalities such as Seoul) and local governments contributing the remainder.

NBLS benefits are multi-layered and include the following schemes (Lee 2015):

- The livelihood benefit helps the poor maintain basic daily living standards. It is provided in cash on a monthly basis, and the allowance includes the cost of clothing, food, and transportation.
- The housing benefit provides assistance with rent and home maintenance. It is paid in cash or through in-kind assistance.

- The **medical care benefit** provides medical care to beneficiaries at a lower rate of co-payment. The co-payment rate for inpatient care is 0% to 10% (whereas the National Health Insurance copayment rate is 20%).

- The **education benefit** provides enrolment fees, tuition, and school supplies.

Thresholds are linked to the national median income, with differentiated lines depending on the type of benefit. As of 2024, the livelihood benefit targets households with income below roughly 30% of the median, the medical benefit extends to those up to 40%, the housing benefit to 46%, and the education benefit to 50%.

Since its inception, the government has taken continuous steps to reduce “blind spots” in the NBLS system, including simplifying income and asset tests and coordinating related safety-net benefits. A major reform was the abolition of the familial support obligation in 2021, which had previously allowed parents’ or children’s resources to affect eligibility and contributed to low take-up (OECD 2023).

As of 2024, approximately 2.67 million people had received benefits under the NBLS (DCI 2025). A person who receives JSA (▶ see Section 2.1) is not eligible for NBLS. Adults aged 18–64 without severe disability or caregiving responsibilities are classified as *conditional beneficiaries* and must participate in workfare or training activities to continue receiving support (World Bank n.d.b). This creates a structured link between social assistance and labour market insertion.

3.2 Institutional arrangements

The NBLS system is overseen by the **Ministry of Health and Welfare**, which sets policy, defines eligibility thresholds, and finances most of the programme. **Local governments at the municipal level** are the primary delivery agents: **local welfare offices** handle applications, verify eligibility, and carry out case management for beneficiaries, supported by the Social Security Information System (▶ see Box 3). They are responsible for assessing each household’s circumstances and determining benefit eligibility and amounts, following national standards. In addition, they play the lead role in enforcing conditionality for able-bodied recipients.

Box 3. The Social Security Information System – Happiness e-Eum[8]

A distinctive feature of Korea's social protection system is its integrated computerized information system, called the Social Security Information System or Happiness e-Eum, which was introduced in 2010 to enhance administrative efficiency. The system is managed by the Social Security Information Service under the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Happiness e-Eum is a management information system established to combine and manage information about the eligibilities and histories of recipients of more than 120 social welfare benefits and services. It integrates over 30 sub-information systems and allows the government to track individual and household benefit records and changes in personal information.

Through Happiness e-Eum, the government can manage the personal information and benefit records of individuals and households on any welfare programme. Once a potential beneficiary submits an application, the system automatically assesses the applicant's eligibility according to the income and personal characteristics found on financial and personal information systems connected to the platform. The system also keeps track of real-time changes, including the birth or death of family members, to modify benefits accordingly. Happiness e-Eum contains information on all welfare benefits received by individuals and households.

On the employment side, the Ministry of Employment and Labor becomes involved when welfare recipients are deemed capable of work. The MoEL-operated Job Centres, mostly integrated in the Employment Welfare Plus Centres (▶ see Box 2), take charge of providing employment services (job counselling, placement, or vocational training opportunities) to referred NBLS recipients. According to the law, a formal inter-agency coordination mechanism exists: local MoHW offices and MoEL offices consult to classify which beneficiaries are "job-ready" and to formulate appropriate integration plans.

In 2016, the MoEL and the MoHW signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance data interoperability between the employment and welfare information systems. This agreement enabled the EWPCs to offer citizens integrated access to both employment and welfare services in a single location, supported by digital interoperability. Following the MoU, welfare agencies began sharing information on 15 categories of service records and eligibility data with employment service providers at the EWPCs. In turn, employment services share 17 categories of employment-related records and eligibility information with welfare counterparts, strengthening coordination and enabling more comprehensive, people-centred support (World Bank, n.d.a).

8 Based on Lee (2015) and World Bank (n.d.a)

A distinct institutional actor is the Korea Central Self-Sufficiency Foundation and its network of local self-sufficiency centres, which design and operate workfare and training projects for conditional beneficiaries who are not yet job-ready. These projects include community work, social enterprises, skills training, and even micro-enterprise development.

3.3 Legal framework

The NBLS Act (1999) establishes the legal right to minimum livelihood protection and defines the structure of benefits. Articles 8 and 11 of the Enforcement Decree stipulate that able-bodied beneficiaries must be designated as conditional recipients and offered placement in self-sufficiency projects or referred to employment services within one month of enrolment. Article 16 provides for sanctions: if a conditional beneficiary fails to participate without good cause, their livelihood benefit is to be suspended or terminated.

The MoHW issues detailed annual Business Guides that translate the law into operational procedures for local officials. The 2024 guide specifies that sanctions typically involve suspension of the full individual portion of the livelihood benefit for three months, after which benefits are reinstated once the beneficiary resumes participation. Welfare offices must issue written notices of suspension, and beneficiaries have the right to appeal or provide justification (for example, illness or caregiving duties).[9]

The NBLS framework also authorizes information-sharing between welfare and employment agencies. Welfare offices must notify employment centres of referrals, and employment centres must provide quarterly reports on beneficiary participation. Immediate notification is required if a participant drops out of a programme, enabling welfare offices to adjust benefits promptly.

9 Based on https://www.mohw.go.kr/board.es?act=view&bid=0009&list_no=1479897&mid=a10402000000&nPage=1&tag=&utm

3.4 Operational workflow

The operational workflow is as follows.

Step 1 Application with NBLS	From the perspective of the beneficiary, the process begins with submitting an application via the Bokjiro portal. This is the public-facing welfare platform that provides information and access to all social protection benefits through a customized lifecycle-based notification system. Individuals and households can apply for benefits, check eligibility via simulation tools, and track the status of their application. The platform is linked to services from nearly 350 central government ministries and over 6,000 local government institutions (Kring and Elder 2022). Alternatively, applicants can also visit their local welfare office or EWPC to receive in-person assistance (▶ see Box 4 for detailed process description in EWPCs).
Step 2 Verification of information	Behind the scenes, the Happiness e-Eum system provides the integrated back-office infrastructure (▶ see Box 3). Caseworkers verify the household's income and property through Happiness e-Eum, which aggregates data from tax, pension, and health insurance systems. A home visit is usually conducted to confirm living conditions.
Step 3 Categorization of work capacity	If the household qualifies, members are categorized according to work capacity. Elderly or disabled members are unconditional beneficiaries, while able-bodied adults aged 18 to 64 without care responsibilities and disabilities are conditional beneficiaries. If the person is deemed employable, the local welfare office starts coordinating with counsellors in the MoEL Job Centre that covers their area.
Step 4 Referral to employment counsellor	The welfare caseworker sends the individual's profile and background to the employment counsellor. The counsellor then schedules an appointment with the beneficiary.
Step 5 Assessment of job-readiness	Based on a detailed assessment, the responsible counsellor develops an employment support plan, as required by Article 13 of the Enforcement Decree. This plan designates a specific activity that the person must engage in to fulfil their welfare obligation. For those who are less job-ready (low skills or long absence from the labour force), the local welfare office might instead refer the client to a Regional Self-Sufficiency Centre (▶ see Section 3.2).

Step 6
Monitoring compliance with active job search

Participation in active job search is monitored closely. As per Article 12 of the Enforcement Decree, implementing agencies (job centres and self-sufficiency centres) must submit quarterly reports to the welfare office and immediately report dropouts. If participation is satisfactory, benefits continue. If not, the welfare office issues a sanction decision, suspending or reducing the benefits for three months. Once the beneficiary resumes participation, benefits are reinstated from the following month. Beneficiaries have the right to appeal or explain any legitimate reason for non-participation (such as illness), in which case benefits might be restored.

Step 7
Entering employment

Throughout the process, the goal is to help the individual ultimately graduate from welfare by securing employment or other income. If a referred beneficiary finds a stable job, two things happen: (1) the employment office notifies the welfare office that the person has gained employment (with details like start date and wage), and (2) depending on the salary, the household may become ineligible for NBLS (if their income rises above the threshold); in that case, the welfare office will terminate benefits.

Box 4. Integrated case management within the Employment Welfare Plus Centres (EPWCs)[10]

The case management approach within the Employment Welfare Plus Centres follows the following service process, all of which are supported by Work Plus (vsee Box 2):

1. Reception: For first-time visitors to the EWPC, the purpose of their visit is checked. If an initial consultation is needed, it is conducted after the visitor signs a consent form.

2. Initial consultation: During the initial consultation, the general counsellor identifies the client's needs by asking questions related to employment barriers, desired employment, welfare, and financial situation (▶ see Figure 2). The information collected during the initial consultation is entered in Work Plus. This allows the counsellor to document basic information (gender, age, disability status, military record) and share the information with other caseworkers if needed. The counsellor can also check the client's history of receiving social welfare services by entering the client's RRN into Work Plus.

3. Service connection: After the initial consultation, the counsellor guides and links the client to the appropriate service counter. When multiple services are required, the counsellor introduces the route considering the locations of the consultation counters and priority of services to be provided. Work Plus allows the counsellor to request relevant services and refer this information to corresponding representatives within the EWPC. A precondition is that the client needs to consent to the sharing of information.

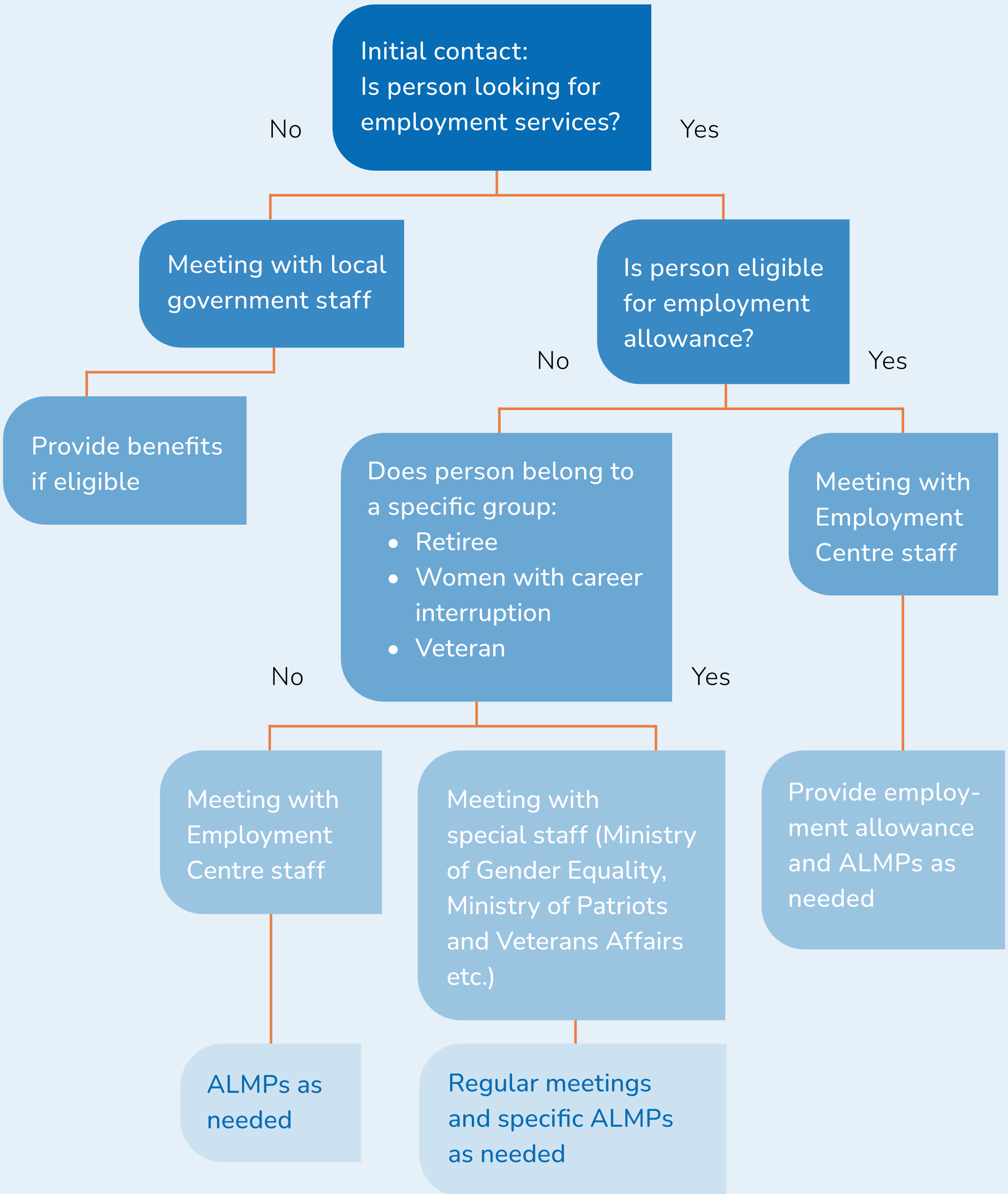
10 Based on World Bank (n.d.a)

4. Opening a case: During a Case Management Council meeting, the team decides if they should start case work for the applicant, as recommended by the counsellor. If the Case Management Council decides to start casework for the applicant, a caseworker is assigned. This caseworker will then develop a Service Provision Plan based on discussions among various agencies. Based on the Service Provision Plan, EWPC officials working in different agencies are notified to provide services accordingly. The entire process is managed through Work Plus.

5. Monitoring: The caseworker uses Work Plus to monitor if different agencies are providing the requested services adequately.

Figure 2. *Standard jobseeker support process in EWPCs*

Source: OECD (2024)



3.5 Key elements of digital interoperability

The NBLS system relies heavily on digital infrastructure. Happiness e-Eum (▶ see Box 3) provides the backbone, enabling automated eligibility checks and continuous follow-up. This includes automated checks with Employment24 (▶ see Box 1). The MoHW uses employment information, such as insured status, from the MoEL to determine eligibility. In the same way, the MoEL actively uses MoHW data to identify and support vulnerable groups in the labour market (Kring and Elder 2022). In addition, Bokjiro (see step 1 in ▶ Section 3.4) offers a citizen-facing portal for applications and status tracking.

The EWPCs and the underlying digital system Work Plus supporting intersectoral case management efforts (▶ see Box 2) provide a bridge between welfare and labour systems. Through Work Plus, staff can access and act upon integrated information drawn from both Happiness e-Eum and the Employment24 platform, as well as other relevant databases. Caseworkers use Work Plus to manage client files, initiate welfare benefit applications, refer individuals to employment services, and track outcomes, without needing to re-enter data or switch systems. Interoperability is underpinned by shared national identifiers, API-based data exchange, and government-wide cloud infrastructure, allowing for seamless and secure coordination across agencies. This enables a truly one-stop, person-centred experience for both clients and frontline staff.

3.6 Critical success factors and remaining challenges

Several factors have contributed to the successful collaboration between employment and welfare services in Korea:

- **The Happiness e-Eum system serves as a unified welfare data backbone.** It integrates information from over 120 welfare programmes and sub-systems, providing real-time eligibility checks and automated updates to household records. This has significantly improved administrative efficiency, transparency, and coordination across social protection schemes.
- **External data integration enables near real-time cross-checks** with administrative sources such as taxation, health insurance, pensions, and civil registry databases. This allows automated assessments of income and household circumstances, reducing fraud and enabling more precise targeting.
- **Work Plus enables frontline staff to access and manage relevant data** from both the social protection system (Happiness e-Eum) and the labour market system (Employment24). It supports shared case planning, service referrals, monitoring, and reporting across agencies, reducing duplication and enabling a person-centred, one-stop service delivery model.

- A strong legal and governance framework links social assistance with labour market insertion. The NBLS Act legally mandates participation in workfare or job-seeking activities for able-bodied adults, while formal protocols and digital systems support structured referrals, benefit coordination, and the enforcement of conditionality.

- Interministerial coordination has driven integration efforts. The 2016 MoU between MoHW and MoEL institutionalized data exchange and paved the way for unified service delivery through EWPCs.

- The Republic of Korea follows a holistic, multi-agency case management approach for individuals with complex needs. Many poor and vulnerable individuals face multiple and interconnected challenges, such as health issues, low skills, or long-term labour market detachment, that cannot be addressed by a single profession or institution. Korea's approach, supported by the EWPC structure and the Work Plus system, enables shared case management across employment, social welfare, and health officers. Cases are jointly discussed in multidisciplinary meetings, and individuals receive coordinated support regardless of their entry channel. This collaborative model allows institutions to address multi-dimensional needs more effectively.

Despite these achievements, the system faces several challenges, which may constrain its performance and scalability:

- The breadth and depth of collaboration between the social welfare and employment institutions depends on the political will and institutional capacities of each municipality. The EWPC model is voluntary, allowing municipalities to decide whether to establish such centres. While most have progressively adopted the approach over the past decade, some have not yet joined. As a result, the level of integration and cooperation between welfare and employment services varies considerably across the country.

- Functional fragmentation within EWPCs persists in some cases. Although services are physically co-located, staff from different agencies operate under distinct management structures, performance metrics, and accountability systems. This limits seamless service delivery and may create friction in cross-agency collaboration.

- Human resource constraints undermine service quality. Many EWPCs report shortages of municipal or partner agency staff, especially specialized case-workers. This limits the ability to offer personalized counselling or sustained follow-up, particularly in more complex cases requiring both employment and social support (OECD 2024). While Work Plus enables the existing staff to work more efficiently by streamlining processes and improving access to information, it cannot fully substitute for adequate staffing.

3.7 Results of the approach

The introduction of the Happiness e-Eum system, which interoperates seamlessly with Employment24 (and previously with the various information systems now integrated therein), has tremendously increased administrative efficiency. Time spent deciding eligibility for benefits of social welfare has fallen dramatically, from 60 days in 2009 to 9.9 days in 2013. The system has also improved transparency and allows government officials to check benefit records and provide any other services relevant to applicants (Lee 2015).

Evaluations of the EWPC approach show that, despite strong financial incentives, integrated referrals and case management approaches and relatively strict control mechanisms, participation in active labour market measures and transitions to employment remain relatively low. This indicates that current labour market insertion measures are not sufficiently effective for many NBLS recipients. Additional measures are, therefore, needed to strengthen work incentives, including adjustments to the benefit tapering rules so that earnings from work lead to more gradual reductions in benefits and make employment more financially attractive (OECD 2022).

Despite progress in expanding statutory employment-insurance coverage to non-standard workers (▶ see Section 2.1) and in strengthening both the coverage and adequacy of the NBLS system (▶ see Section 3.1), many unemployed individuals receive neither unemployment insurance nor social assistance (OECD 2023). They include many self-employed workers, platform workers, short-term or intermittent workers whose contribution histories remain insufficient to qualify for unemployment insurance, and inactive individuals who are neither working nor receiving social assistance. Younger jobseekers, women returning to the labour market after career breaks, and older workers in precarious forms of employment are also disproportionately affected by these coverage gaps.

3.8 Way forward

The persistence of these blind spots has prompted the development of new approaches, most notably the National Employment Support Programme (NESP) (▶ see Box 5). Owing to its strong activation focus, early programme results recorded employment rates of around 60% between 2016 and 2019, with roughly half of participants remaining in employment for more than one year. These initial results provided the basis for a subsequent expansion of the programme in 2021 (OECD 2022).

Box 5. The National Employment Service Programme (NESP)[11]

In January 2021, Korea launched the National Employment Service Programme, designed as a second-tier unemployment benefit scheme to provide income support and tailored employment services to groups not covered by traditional unemployment insurance or social assistance. The programme targets low-income individuals, unemployed youth, and career-interrupted women, offering both financial assistance and personalized guidance to help them (re)enter the labour market.

Participants receive in-depth counselling to assess their employment aspirations and capabilities, leading to the development of individual job-seeking plans. Based on these plans, beneficiaries gain access to a comprehensive range of services, including vocational training, work experience opportunities, resume and interview assistance, and job-matching support.

Eligibility for the job-seeking encouragement benefit is determined by income and asset criteria. Individuals whose household income is 60% or less of the national median and whose assets are valued below Korean won (KRW) 400 million (approximately USD 270,000) may qualify. For young people aged 18 to 34, the income threshold is set lower (at 120% or less of the median income), with assets not exceeding KRW 500 million (approximately USD 338,000). Eligible participants receive KRW 500,000 (approximately USD 338) per month for up to six months, conditional on active engagement in the job-search activities specified in their individual plans.

An Employment Success Allowance of up to KRW 1.5 million (approximately USD 1,000) is paid to programme participants with household income below 60% of the median and who successfully take up employment. The amount depends on the duration of the employment contract (a lump-sum payment of KRW 500,000 for continuous employment for 6 months, plus a lump-sum of KRW 1 million for continuous employment for 12 months).

Since 2023, the programme has been expanded to include an additional allowance of KRW 100,000 (approximately USD 67) per dependent (up to a total of KRW 400,000) for jobseekers who support children under 18, older dependents aged 70 or above, or family members with severe disabilities. This supplement helps reduce the financial strain on vulnerable households during job search. Furthermore, since 2024, recipients have been allowed to retain benefits even while earning income through part-time work, ensuring continued participation in the labour market while maintaining livelihood stability.

The NESP management information system is embedded in Employment24 (▶ see Box 1), allowing jobseekers and case managers to complete all NESP-related procedures through a single digital interface.

11 Based on MoEL (2024), OECD (2023) and DCI (2025)

The NESP service process follows a structured sequence:

- **Application:** Individuals submit a formal application through Employment Centres or EWPCS.
- **Eligibility test and verification:** Authorities perform data checks across multiple systems, including social assistance, credit, taxation, and health insurance databases, by making use of the Work Plus system.
- **Development of an Individual Action Plan (IAP):** A counsellor and the participant jointly design a personalized employment plan, triggering the first benefit payment.
- **Job search and participation phase:** Participants are required to engage in employment activities at least twice a month to continue receiving benefits. They may also join work-experience programmes, including work trial schemes (24–30 days, 4 hours per day) or internships lasting up to 3 months.
- **Aftercare and employment incentives:** Beneficiaries who secure employment may receive the Employment Success Allowance after one year of sustained employment.

4 Conclusion

The reforms and evolutions described in the preceding sections have unfolded within the broader framework of the Republic of Korea's long-standing digital governance agenda. Over several decades, Korea has pursued a consistent strategy of harnessing digital technologies to modernize public administration, improve service efficiency, and transform the way government interacts with citizens. What began as an effort to streamline internal processes gradually developed into a comprehensive approach in which public services are increasingly interactive, personalized, and centred on user needs (Kring and Elder 2022).

Within this overarching trajectory, the domains of social protection and employment have been at the forefront of Korea's digital transformation. In both policy areas, Korea invested early in robust management information systems and developed the institutional capacity needed to administer increasingly complex programmes. These foundations enabled a shift from the digitalization of isolated processes to more advanced forms of interoperability – both within each sector and across them – allowing information to move seamlessly between programmes, agencies, and levels of government.

Crucially, these technological advances have not occurred in isolation, but have reinforced – and been reinforced by – strong policy coherence and sustained institutional collaboration. In addition, and equally important, legal frameworks to improve coordination between social protection and PES, interministerial agreements, and operational coordination at local level through structures such as the EWPCs enable better alignment and integration of programmes and services across the two domains.

The case study illustrates how the Republic of Korea has employed different models of digital interoperability to meet various policy objectives. The integration of unemployment insurance administration within the broader labour market information system Employment24 brings income protection and re-employment support together in a single digital environment (▶ see Section 2). Real-time data exchange between Employment24 and Happiness e-Eum enables welfare and employment information to be combined, improving the efficiency and accuracy of service delivery (▶ see Section 3).

Ongoing efforts to establish a unified case-management approach across the social protection and employment domains through the EPWCs are supported by Work Plus, which brings together relevant data from various government (and non-governmental) databases to facilitate case management (▶ see Box 3 and Box 4). Finally, the National Employment Support Programme, whose management information system is fully embedded in Employment24, shows how income support and employment promotion can be coordinated in a single, integrated programme (▶ see Box 5).

Taken together, these examples show that there is no single pathway towards inter-operability between social protection administrations/schemes and PES and their underlying information systems. Rather, Korea's experience demonstrates that multiple approaches can coexist, complement one another, and be combined within a single country context to address different institutional needs and policy objectives.

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