

The South Koreans who won't leave their rooms

The South Korean government has identified isolation among youths as a welfare issue

BY JOHN FENG

South Korea is taking an experimental approach to an ill-defined problem by offering the country's solitary young citizens a regular **living allowance** in the hope it will encourage their reintegration with society.

So-called **"reclusive youths,"**

who the government says rarely leave their homes, could receive a monthly handout of 650,000 won (\$490) on top of additional support for personal and professional development, according to a legislative amendment announced in early April by the cabinet of President Yoon Suk Yeol.

South Korea, one of the world's most advanced economies, is as wealthy as it's ever been, with **longevity** and living standards on the rise. Seoul's decision to help a small but **vulnerable subset of the population** speaks to a maturing **welfare system** rather than a growing social issue, subject matter experts say.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has extended schooling support, **counseling** and career training for those aged 9-24 by drawing a direct line between youths living in relative isolation and existing concerns about the country's at-risk adolescents, including statistics of self-harm among teenagers and youth adults.

In the 19-39 age group, an estimated 338,000 people, or 3.1 percent, experience social isolation, said an accompanying study by the government-funded Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. Among those categorized as recluses in the 19-29 age bracket, 40 percent said **seclusion** began in their adolescence, according to a paper by the Korea Youth Counseling and Welfare Institute, also publicly funded.

