

International Migration to Japan: Can It Be a Solution to Population Decline?

Yoshitaka ISHIKAWA

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the possible contribution of international migration to Japan, whose total population reached its peak in 2008 and has been in decline since then. After outlining the country's international migration and examining regional differences in the country's population decline, three topics are discussed: the influx of foreign women resulting from cross-border marriage, the new point system for attracting highly skilled people—with a focus on overseas students—and policies directing international migrants to peripheral regions, similar to those implemented in Australia and Canada. On the national scale, immigration of foreign nationals has certainly compensated for a part of the decline in Japanese nationals. On a regional scale, however, the trends indicate a growing regional disparity in international in-migration; since their main destination is the Tokyo metropolitan area, the immigration of foreigners to the peripheral regions, which have suffered various problems arising from serious depopulation, is much less significant. Accordingly, understanding the role international migration can play in alleviating population decline in Japan's peripheral areas has become particularly important. Furthermore, Japan's ability to successfully foster replacement migration will be a vital policy issue in the 21st century, so the national government should devise comprehensive social integration policies for the smooth settlement and permanent residence of immigrants.

Keywords: international migration, population decline, replacement migration, regional disparity, peripheral areas