

Prospect for Realizing Reforms in Migration Policy in Japan  
- in the Face of Global Risks and Refugee Crisis -

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key words

mismatches in the labor markets, middle-skill jobs, integration through qualification

Abstract

With the background of increasing global risks such as climate change, development of regional economic integration and growing income and wealth gaps in many countries, international migration is in a rising tendency. This article aims to make stocktaking and future prospects of migration policy from the standpoint of labor market in Japan in the face of global risks and possible refugee crisis in the world.

When we trace the historical development of foreign workers and examine the present stage of legal systems as well as public policies in Japan, the present institutional scheme has been established since 1990, which is still heavily biased to immigration control policy. Integration policy of foreigners, which should guarantee their rights, encourage fulfillment of their obligations and promote their active participation in the society, is still dependent upon initiatives of municipalities. In the meantime, 1) in Asia, there emerge complex mismatches in the labor markets not only for the highly skilled, but also for the middle skilled and for the low skilled. In Japan, too, those foreigners who entered Japan for the purpose of working occupy less than 30 % of the whole foreign workforce. Necessities for supporting language learning and vocational qualification of foreigners have proven to be very strong. In addition, 2) in Asia, internal migration of youngsters from rural to urban areas has become a strong trend. In Japan, while youngsters are going out from rural areas, the ratio of foreign inhabitants there is in a rising tendency. More than half of foreign inhabitants have already acquired permanent resident status. There are increasing needs especially for integrating the second and third generation foreigners into the society. 3) With the establishment of the ASEAN Community at the end of 2015, the protection of migrant workers has been acknowledged as an important policy agenda. However, there has been no strong political will in Japan to make enactment to effectively prohibit discrimination of foreigners and promote qualification of foreigners from the standpoint of integration.

Even when international migration will globally grow faster as a consequence of “refugee crisis” which emerged in Middle East, North Africa and Europe, it is very difficult for Japan as well as many Asian countries to guarantee stable employment and adequate living standard for refugees, as mismatches in the labor markets there are complicated and they cannot be effectively reduced under the present system. Especially important are lacks of institutional infrastructure of language and training, which should realize “integration through qualification”.

In order to reduce risks for foreigners and their children to fall into the lowest tier of the society, it is urgently necessary to establish a comprehensive migration policy which comprises of the two pillars, namely immigration control policy and integration policy for foreigners together with the schemes for “integration through qualification”.

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