



Report

EU-PACIFIC TALKS:

EUROPE AND THE INDO-PACIFIC: MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

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Demographic developments – the “greying” of society – remain an issue across the first world; in Europe, the expansion of the welfare state and elevated standards of services has put increasing demands on productivity to maintain the prosperity that has become an integral part of the societal contract. In this context, the dwindling generations represent an existential concern. However, no country is more emblematic of this than Japan, whose demographic developments pose fundamental questions about the future of society. Will migration – a contested issue both in Japan and Europe despite being as old as civilization – represent an inevitable solution as the overall global population increases and inequality widens?

All of this was discussed in the next debate of the EU-Pacific Talks series, with speakers **Shihoko Goto**, Director for Geoeconomics and Indo-Pacific Enterprise and Deputy Director, Asia Program, Wilson Center; **Marie Jelínková**, Institute of Sociological Studies, Charles University in Prague; **Yu Korekawa**, Director, Department of International Research and Cooperation, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research; and **Vít Novotný**, Senior Research Officer, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

From a European perspective migration, integration and concept of the welfare state are all contested topics. It is good to know that migration has always been part of the international community and human history. Interestingly though, when looking at history, the absolute number of migrants currently is less than in the 1960s, as *Marie Jelínková* emphasized.

European states have throughout the years gained vast experience with human relocations to know at least what kind of cohabitation with the migrants could work. While the assimilation policies based on the French model did not seem to be effective, the German mode of segregating the Turkish migrants in Germany also showed problematic. The third example, the so-called British

multiculturalism, seemed to work on the surface, though some limits to it later became obvious. These diverse experiences lead Europe to learn from the past to manage cohabitation with the migrants. They paved the way for better methods of enabling the active participation of migrants in order to integrate them in the future.

According to *Marie Jelínková*, the question, therefore, is mainly whether Europe will be able to transfer knowledge and the experience into practise – a question exacerbated by the realities of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the influx of migrants from the Eastern European country. However, there is also a tendency to create demand for a specific types of migrants – mainly the well-skilled and qualified migrants. A trait that is shared with other developed countries outside of Europe as well, with Japan being no exception, as confirmed by *Yu Korekawa*.

This reality can be then disrupted by two types of problems: either the state lacks capability to effectively manage the migration into its territories; or the country becomes also the destination for less- or non-qualified workers, thus resulting in a strain on the state's ability to provide trainings and education. The European countries will also have to deal with the fact that though more than 35 % of the migrants who arrived in Europe are well-qualified only 2 % of them have so far been able to find comparable work in terms of qualification demand. So far, the European states haven't been able to use their knowledge and qualifications.

Vít Novotný mentioned that it would also be beneficial to look at the speed of the absorption and accommodation of the integration process in the case of the European models. One possible reason for unsuccessful integration may not only lie in the way of integration but also in the time frame of the acceptance. *Yu Korekawa* agreed and pointed out that Europe and Japan need more controlled and legal migration due to far too large migration and failures in capacity-building

processes. Controlled migration flows would be the best solution for absorbing capacity in the societies to handle mass migration.

The speakers all agreed that demography and migration are connected with migration itself being one of the potential solutions for fighting against the aging population and the low fertility rate in both the European and Japanese populations. As *Shihoko Goto* mentioned, the two tendencies are going hand in hand in the case of Europe and Japan, as a contrary to the South-Pacific, Latin America, and Africa where the population is rather dynamic and much younger. However, the phenomenon is not unique and is in fact a global tendency that affects societies as they lose their ability to renew themselves worldwide, as *Vít Novotný* stated. It is also something that Japan has been experiencing for a long time, ahead of other countries.

However, the picture is more complex in the case of Europe since not every European country is experiencing such a population decrease. There are in fact countries that are projected to gain in population, thus it cannot be expected of the European countries to be willing to accept a united stance where migration is concerned. This makes the topic of migration a highly politicized topic connected to questions of refugees, the absorption of the labour market and other EU policies, as opposed to the narrower, and more traditional, outlook at migration as a solution to the population decreases.

As *Yu Korekawa* highlighted the prospect of Japan, the total immigrant population will replace the aging and decreasing society by 2040, meaning that the total migrant population will reach 6,5 % instead of the current 2,6 %, projecting Japan to be the 6th biggest country in terms of hosting of immigration population. The biggest difference between Japan and European countries is that Japan mainly hosts labour migrants, while Europe tends to be a destination for refugees and asylum seekers.

Dealing with migrant communities is challenging for both Japan and Europe thus bringing many political and economic issues to the table including decreased competitiveness, and regional and global security concerns. Therefore, it's really important whether Japan and Europe perceive migration as a solution to the challenges they're facing, or at least try to address the issues. All of the speakers agreed that technological developments and migration itself could be solutions for the demographic changes both in Japanese and European populations.