

Focus: Challenges Posed by Movement of People: Refugees and Migrants (Summary)

Essay: A Change of Mindset is Required on Refugees and Migrants Issues

Saburo Takizawa (Professor Emeritus, Toyo Eiwa University; Vice Chairman, CARE International Japan)

In 2023, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons reached 117 million and that of migrants (including refugees) reached 280 million. The burgeoning number of illegal immigrants and refugees has become a political issue in Europe, and countries are tightening border controls. The UK laws on illegal immigration are particularly symbolic, but the number of illegal immigrations is also increasing in the US, where immigration policy has become an issue in the presidential election. Facing more serious circumstances are the countries of the Global South, where tens of million refugees languish with nowhere to go. The main causes of the refugee problem are persecution, civil strife, and war, but the corresponding international protection systems are dysfunctional. The reasons for this are preoccupation with the concept of “persecution,” limitations on territorial asylum, entanglement with the immigration problem, and imbalances in the burden of costs. A change in thinking is hence required to alleviate the immigrant/refugee problem. Specifically, it is necessary to expand the scope of coverage from “persecution” to “danger,” to adopt economic approaches in addition to legal approaches, and to transfer funds from developed countries to developing countries based on the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”.

1 The Palestinian Refugee Problem in the Context of the Israel-Gaza War: Closed Borders and the Mess Over Calls to Dismantle UNRWA

Aiko Nishikida (Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law, Keio University)

The Israel-Gaza war that began in October 2023 has seen intense fighting for more than eight months. Many of the residents of the Gaza Strip have lost their homes and been repeatedly forced to flee within the Gaza Strip. Neighboring Egypt and Jordan have closed their borders to these residents and refused to accept them as refugees. While European countries have taken a strict stance as well on accepting refugees, brokers are making substantial profits by facilitating the movement of people trying to flee the Gaza Strip. The influence of the European refugee crisis of 2015 can be seen there. Another incident which drew significant attention was Hamas’ alleged involvement in UNRWA, which has provided indispensable aid to Palestinian refugees for more than 70 years. The political neutrality of the aid agency was suddenly questioned, and 16 donor countries suspended their contributions. Israel even proposed the abolition of UNRWA. It was based on its political perception of the ongoing Palestinian refugee problem as a threat, with an emergency ruling in the genocide case filed by South Africa against Israel as a background factor.

2 The 2024 US Presidential Election and Immigration Policy

Takeshi Umekawa (Professor, Graduate Schools for Law and Politics, The University of Tokyo)

This paper discusses why and how Democratic Party has been put at a disadvantage in terms of immigration policy, examining the legal origins of the illegal immigration issue and the process by which immigration policy has been incorporated into the polarization of the two major political par-

ties as well as the arbitrariness and instability of problem solving through presidential authority. Following the pandemic, the previously restrained wave of would-be immigrants crashed into the physical barriers of the US southern border wall and the legal barriers built up since the Immigration Act of 1965. These “barriers” have not been impervious, however, and there is still no consensus in the United States as to what the “barriers” should look like. In a polarized political climate, there is little hope for fundamental policy reform through bipartisan consensus, and the president has no choice but to enact policies in a piecemeal fashion based on his flimsy authority. Immigration policy will remain a difficult problem to solve beyond 2024, no matter who the next president is.

3 The EU’s Attempts and Limitations in Building Reciprocal Migration Systems

Yumi Nakayama (Associate Professor, Institute of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

The EU and the UK are undertaking major overhauls of their immigration policies and, while the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact ostensibly calls for greater solidarity among member states, its implementation will require stronger cooperation than ever before, including the conclusion of readmission agreements with countries in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere outside Europe. A mutually beneficial strategy, as symbolized by the UK-Rwanda agreement, is needed. In this sense, the EU’s efforts to externalize its migration policy have expanded the scope of “outside” EU partners further south from the gatekeeper countries on the main routes of irregular migration, and the nature of cooperation has changed from unilateral to bilateral, necessitating awareness of partner countries’ interests, compared to those which the EU initially assumed. However, development assistance and other benefits provided by the EU are not enough of an incentive for “external” partner countries to conclude readmission agreements detrimental to their own interests, requiring the EU to make further concessions to implement the new Migration and Asylum Pact.

4 Fight, Flee, or Be Famished?:

Myanmar and “Human Mobility” in the Post-Coup Period

Yoshihiro Nakanishi (Associate Professor, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University)

The coup d’état in Myanmar took place on February 1, 2021. Three and a half years on, the world’s attention is rarely focused on the country, despite the conflict there worsening and humanitarian crises becoming the norm in many parts of the country. This is forcing people to flee their home within Myanmar or into other countries. Even in the areas unaffected by the conflict, more and more Myanmar people are leaving their country because of lowering level of public service and worsening economic situation. Myanmar, which attracted attention in the 2010s for its economic reforms and democratization, now finds itself amid political instability and economic stagnation and facing an uncertain future. Under these circumstances, the most important focus should be people’s lives and livelihoods. The international community needs to minimize the harm by giving humanitarian assistance the highest priority. In addition, none of the diplomatic approaches taken since the coup have produced sufficient results. In parallel with humanitarian assistance efforts, concerted international pressure and coordinated engagement will be needed to stop the violence perpetrated by all parties.

5 The Russo-Ukrainian War and Displaced Persons: The Sustainability of Acceptance and Assistance

Ryuya Daidouji (Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, Aoyama Gakuin University)

The war between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in the displacement of large numbers of displaced

persons whom the EU has actively admitted by expressing a welcoming attitude and activating the Temporary Protection Directive. As of this writing, Japan has also accepted some 2,600 such persons. With no signs of an end to the war, however, some in these host countries are beginning to feel “solidarity fatigue,” and the sustainability of accepting and supporting displaced persons is becoming a new issue. This paper therefore examines the following questions: 1) why and how did the EU and Japan accept displaced persons from Ukraine, and 2) is the acceptance of displaced persons by the EU and Japan sustainable and, if so, why? Regarding (1), this paper notes that humanitarianism underlies the response to displaced persons from Ukraine, a response plagued by problems of arbitrariness and discrimination. Regarding (2), this paper considers future acceptance of and assistance for displaced persons uncertain institutionally, politically, and possibly socially, and finds it difficult to believe that sustainability has been ensured despite the institutional changes made by both the EU and Japan.

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