

Immigration

Presently less than 1 percent of Japan's population were born in a Foreign Country, this compares with about 8 percent of the United Kingdom, 12 percent in the United States, 20 percent in Canada and 29% in Australia. Among highly developed countries, Japan is quite unusual in having such a small percentage of its population foreign born.

Until recently, this fact has not seemed to have had much impact on Japan's economy or its standard of living. However in the near future, the lack of foreigners in Japan could hurt both economic growth and the quality of life. This is due to the falling fertility rate and the aging of society.

In 2006, the average number of babies per couple in Japan stood at 1.32. This is far below the level of about 2.0 needed for a population to remain stable. Many other developed countries also have a low fertility rate, such as Italy and Germany, which are actually even lower than Japan.

However, there is one major difference. Most developed countries which have low fertility rates have policies which allow foreigners to immigrate. For example Canadian women have an average of only about 1.5 children per woman, which is quite low. Unlike Japan, however, Canada allows about 250,000 immigrants to enter each year, which is equivalent to almost 1 percent of its population. Australia allows 300,000 which is equivalent to 1.5 percent of its population.

In Japan, generally it is quite difficult for people to come and live unless they have Japanese ancestry. This is why many Brazilians and Peruvians who have Japanese ancestors have come to Japan in recent years.

Although this policy maintains Japan as a country with Japanese blood, it restricts immigration to a very small group of people. It also gives Japan very few people to choose from. On the other hand countries such as Australia and Switzerland actively seek skilled immigrants such as doctors, engineers and nurses.

Japan's population is aging quickly and as a result will decline quickly. Many experts say that there will be 30% less people in Japan by 2050. With such a restrictive immigration policy Japan's economy will decline as it is not attracting as many talented people as it could from overseas.

Already Japan has suffered through difficult economic times. Soon Japan may need to decide whether it is better to have racial purity with a lower standard of living, or diversity with a higher one.