



Critical Assessment of Japan's Policy on Refugees and Migrants
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The title of the second session was “Critical assessment of Japan’s policy on refugees and migrants”. Mr. Ken Inoue, Vice President of GPAJ, moderated the session, and Mr. Akio Nakayama, former Country Director, IOM Myanmar, and Ms. Khadiza Begum, Area coordinator of “Online learning support for Rohingya children in Tatebayashi City”. After Mr. Inoue’s report on the activities of the Refugee Crisis Study Group of GPAJ, Mr. Nakayama reported on the “Refugee and Humanitarian Migration policy of Japan”.

Refugee protection is an essential part of international human rights standards which were established based on lessons from the 2nd World War. States have also developed discretionary and humanitarian protection measures in the face of crisis-driven human mobility including “mixed migration flows”. Japan has responded to humanitarian movement, first with the acceptance of Indochinese refugees which started in the 1970s. It was followed by refugees recognized under the Refugee Convention which Japan ratified in 1981. Japan also started the third country resettlement of refugees in 2010. Besides, Japan has provided some discretionary protection measures through special permission for some asylums seekers on the humanitarian ground, and emergency temporary status for those facing difficulty returning to home countries due to political crisis, etc. While Japan’s low refugee recognition rate has been criticized, it is commendable that Japan has become the first resettlement country in Asia. However, Japan’s refugee resettlement programme shows some limitations such as a small annual quota and its strong emphasis on integration prospect. In addition to the need for more flexible refugee recognition, Japan has faced new challenges due to a series of humanitarian crises since last year. These include response to those fleeing from armed conflicts, as well as the evacuation of Afghan people who are facing serious risk for their safety due to their collaboration with Japan. Japan’s active support for displaced Ukrainian, including support from private-sector and voluntary groups, is commendable, but Japan needs to develop comprehensive support mechanism including those fleeing from the countries for which Japan has historical and political responsibility such as Myanmar and Afghanistan. Japan should introduce subsidiary protection in line with the EU and other major destination countries, as well as further expand third country resettlement programme, as an important part of Japan’s international contributions.



Then, Ms. Begum reported on “Challenges of Myanmar Muslim women in Japan”. I am a Rohingya born in Bangladesh. I am married to my husband who was granted refugee status in Japan and I came to Japan at the age of 19. Thanks to various support, I graduated from Aoyama Gakuin University and worked at UNIQLO company. Since I wanted to continue studying, I am now taking a Master’s course at Waseda University. I live in Tokyo with my husband and 2 children and support Myanmar Muslim women mainly Rohingya women living in Tatebayashi city, Gunma prefecture. In Myanmar, Muslim people including Rohingya and Burma Muslims are the minority and have been discriminated against and persecuted. As the result, Many Myanmar Muslims have escaped to Japan. Most of them are men but some women also came to Japan as a wife, a student, or a trainee. At present approximately 200 Myanmar Muslim women are living in Japan. Their academic background is very low and their life is restricted by traditional paternalistic culture. Therefore, they can neither have a connection with Japanese society nor become economically independent. I believe that Myanmar Muslim women should be given more opportunities to learn advanced Japanese language and vocational skills necessary for economic independence. In my case, I learned the Japanese language at Refugee Assistance Headquarters (RHQ) and a language school with a discounted tuition fee. I could graduate from a university because of UNHCR Refugee Higher Education Programme (RHEP). My world changed because I could learn at a university together with Japanese students. I have been supporting Myanmar Muslim women when they go to a hospital or when they do not know how to communicate with their children’s school. One day, a level 3 primary school kid told me that there was no meaning to show a letter from a school to my mum, I was shocked very. Since then, I have been assisting Myanmar Muslim women to be independent mentally, socially, and economically.

After the two reports, we had a discussion session with the participants. We discussed various interesting questions and opinions such as the attitude and thought of the husbands of these Myanmar Muslim women and the importance and difficulty to teach their children their mother tongue, tradition, and culture in Japan.