



Balancing Humanitarian Needs and Political Objectives: Understanding Japan's Immigration Policy



2 May 2024, 10:15am-11:45am

Rämistrasse 71, CH-8001 Zürich (KOL-H-322)

Guest Lecture by Sayaka Osanami-Törngren

Associate Professor in International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö University, Sweden

Abstract:

Japan's immigration policy navigates a delicate equilibrium between addressing labor shortages and preserving social and cultural coherence. Notably, Japan's stance on refugee reception is considerably stringent compared to many other industrialized nations. While Japan extends support to global refugee assistance endeavors through financial aid and humanitarian programs, its own initiatives for refugee reception and resettlement remain modest in scale.

In 2010, the Japanese government launched a Resettlement Pilot Project, marking Japan as the first Asian nation to undertake such an initiative. Despite its pioneering efforts, Japan's commitment to refugee resettlement remains limited, with an annual quota of merely 30 individuals. Who are these resettled refugees, and what does life entail for them?

In this presentation, I not only share the findings but also recount the research journey from two studies conducted between 2014 and 2015, which delved into the pilot phase of Japan's resettlement program. These studies shed light on the experiences of 18 Karen/Burmese refugee families resettled in Japan from 2010 to 2014, as well as insights from stakeholders supporting these resettled communities. Although a decade has passed since these studies were conducted, they still stand as some of the most comprehensive examinations of the lives of resettled refugees in Japan. Through this talk I also aim to draw attention to the complexities of researching often overlooked issues in Japanese society.

Biography:

Sayaka Osanami Törngren, an Associate Professor in International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER), is currently conducting full-time research at the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity, and Welfare. Her research focuses on race, racialization, racism, discrimination, and inequality, with extensive experience in managing externally funded projects. Törngren earned her B.A. from Sophia University, Tokyo, and a Ph.D. from the joint program at Malmö/Linköping University, where her dissertation, *Love Ain't Got No Color- Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage in Sweden*, received Malmö University's Dissertation of the Year award in 2012. Additionally, she teaches courses on race, ethnicity, and identity within the International Migration and Ethnic Relations Master's program and supervises M.A. students in their research endeavors.