



#### ***The Ageing of the Japanese Population: A Demographic Crossroad***

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Japan is at the moment the fastest ageing society in the world. Projections show that from the year 2007 the population will start to decrease from around 127 millions reaching 100 millions by the year 2050. The main decrease will be among the 15-64 age group followed by the 0-14 group. In contrast the 65 + age group will increase notably. As early as 1975 total fertility fell below two: a below- replacement fertility rate. Since then, the population has experienced a constant decline in marital fertility. Dire economic and political consequences were predicted for countries whose populations failed to replace themselves. To cope with that situation, Japan is shifting from the traditional value system that placed primary responsibility on families for the support of older people to more community and government based one. From 1961 the government introduced laws to promote comprehensive public pensions and health insurance policies. Later in successive moves, the government introduced new laws helping with payments in medical expenditures. There were successive restructures of the public pension and insurance systems from 1985 to 1989. In 1995, the National Government handed over most of its responsibilities over aged care issues to local governments. The aims were to provide more services at home, to train people in the care of the elderly and improve the services at a regional level. Finally in 2000 a universal long-term insurance was introduced. This paper follows the demographic changes that are underlying the steps taken by the Japan's policy makers preparing to meet that demographic crossroad.