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Japanese look to robots to fill empty jobs

3.5 million positions could be filled by 2025

by Katie Scott published on 11 April 2008

Japan could look to robots to fill empty jobs left vacant as its population shrinks.

Experts are predicting that Japan could face a 16% slide in the size of its workforce by 2030.

This, coupled with an increasingly elderly population, may force the government into drastic action and a thinktank has now suggested that robots may well provide the solution.

The Machine Industry Memorial Foundation says robots could fill 3.5 million vacant jobs by 2025, ranging from micro-sized capsules that detect lesions to help medical staff to high-tech vacuum cleaners.

The foundation said in a report that robots will not actually replace humans (queue sighs of relief from all of us who have watched too many sci-fi films) but could just help out giving people more time to focus on more important jobs.

For example, robots could provide some relief for those caring for the elderly.

The report suggests Japan could save 2.1 trillion yen (\$21 billion) of elderly insurance payments in 2025 by using robots that monitor the health of older people, rather than having to use human nursing care.

And robots could also be drafted in as childminders - performing tasks like reading books to children at bedtime.

"Seniors are pushing back their retirement until they are 65 years old, day care centers are being built so that more women can work during the day, and there is a move to increase the quota of



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foreign laborers. But none of these can beat the shrinking workforce", Takao Kobayashi, who worked on the study, told Reuters.

"Robots are important because they could help in some ways to alleviate such shortage of the labor force."

But Kobayashi did add that the price of robots will have to be brought down significantly before they can be used for everyday, menial tasks.

"There's the expensive price tag, the functions of the robots still need to improve, and then there are the mindsets of people. People need to have the will to use the robots."