Improving Assistance for Foreign Residents During Disasters

—Overview of 2012 report by the Council for the Promotion of Multicultural Coexistence, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications—

Current conditions & issues

Recommendations

1. Greater Familiarity with Information about Foreign Residents
   - It is essential that municipalities make routine efforts to be familiar with information about foreign residents in their area by utilizing the network of the foreign community and related organizations.

2. Training and Utilization of Key Human Resources
   - Training and utilization of experts
     ▶ In addition to furthering the training and recruitment of volunteers and experts to support local multicultural coexistence, it is important to develop plans to utilize their expertise by creating opportunities for them to do outreach work throughout various regions.
   - Foreign residents as providers of support
     ▶ It is important for municipalities, etc. to make use of the potential response capabilities foreign residents have to be of assistance in disaster situations. In order to achieve this goal, it is particularly important to maintain long-term relationships with key individuals in the foreign resident community.
     ▶ Partnering with local universities to involve foreign exchange students in support programs is also effective.

3. Partnerships Between Organizations
   - Strengthening partnerships with foreign residents and relevant organizations at the municipal level
     ▶ Municipalities are the main contact for foreign residents during disasters, and as such should be prepared to provide support during disaster situations by networking with a diverse set of organizations and groups with expertise in a variety of fields (e.g., regional international associations, social welfare institutions, NPOs, etc.).
     ▶ Within municipalities, it is necessary to create a working relationship between the internationalization and disaster-preparedness departments during normal times.

   - It is necessary to establish a translation and interpretation system, the core of which should be composed of experts from local universities, etc., as well as volunteers.
   - Considering the limitations on preparing multilingual information during disasters, it is effective to utilize “simple Japanese” which many foreign residents can understand.
   - It is effective to provide information to foreign residents by telephone calls or household visits, as well as by utilizing media or modes of communication that are popular among the foreign community.
   - The national government should also take responsibility for establishing a system capable of quickly issuing multilingual information related to disaster situations.

5. Importance of Frequent and Everyday Cooperation
   - To ensure that foreign residents can protect themselves appropriately during a disaster, it is important to raise disaster-prevention awareness by supporting education programs and activities for foreign residents.
   - It is extremely important to encourage active participation by foreign residents in such disaster-preparedness training, and to ensure that practical training, such as the establishment of multilingual disaster support centers and the operation of evacuation centers that can provide care for foreign residents is included.
Disaster Support Center following the Great East Japan Earthquake

Sendai International Relations Association: Activities of the Sendai City Multilingual Disaster Support Center following the Great East Japan Earthquake

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake which occurred on March 11, 2011, the Sendai International Relations Association established the Sendai City Multilingual Disaster Support Center via the Sendai International Center. Through cooperation with citizen’s groups, NPOs, and other international organizations, the center provided multilingual information, offered telephone consultations, visited evacuation centers and responded to embassy and media inquiries.

During the three days following the earthquake until electricity was restored, there was no heating and few computers could be used. During the first six days, the center operated 24 hours a day. The multilingual information provided consisted mainly of translations of information from the Sendai City government, other relevant organizations, and local newspapers. It was transmitted online and by radio, as well as during visits to evacuation centers. Since the role of the Multilingual Disaster Response Center within Sendai City had been decided in advance, the center selected and translated information required by foreign victims of the earthquake from daily reports that were fixed by Sendai City’s disaster headquarters. Information to be used that day was translated by staff at the center for large amounts of information and information for which accuracy was more important than speed of translation. The translation work was divided among cooperating universities, NPOs and groups outside the disaster area. Furthermore, through cooperation with CLAIR, personnel were deployed from other international relations associations to provide cooperation in languages with insufficient interpreters, and to handle the increase in administrative work.

Sendai City Backup Center: utilizing experiences from the Niigata Prefecture Chuuetsu Earthquake and Chuuetsu Offshore Earthquake

Taking advantage of lessons learned from the Niigata Prefecture Chuuetsu Earthquake and Chuuetsu Offshore Earthquake, Sendai City, the Japan National Council of Social Welfare and an NPO signed a three-way agreement. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Volunteer Center of the Japan National Council of Social Welfare led the establishment of a Backup Center consisting of NPOs in the surrounding area with expertise in providing support in areas such as child-raising, nursing care, and assistance for foreign residents. On June 30, the center managed a total of approximately 4,000 volunteers.

Specialized groups assigned to the Backup Center functioned smoothly through mutual cooperation. For example, when the center was contacted by a foreign mother in need of diapers, it would have taken a long time to collect and send diapers of a single group dedicated to supporting foreign residents was to have acted alone. However, upon consulting and cooperating with a child-raising NPO, it was possible to respond by informing the mother of how to use the service. The Backup Center, which took advantage of lessons from previous disasters, supplemented the lack of expertise at other regular volunteer centers established by the Japan National Council of Social Welfare, including the provision of multilingual support.

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies: Disaster information support activities following the Great East Japan Earthquake

In order to take advantage of the university’s unique strengths as a foreign language university, the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies makes multilingual translations by promoting the activities of its faculty, staff, and graduate student language volunteers, operating a registration system for such volunteers, and holding a seminar to train personnel with expert knowledge on the development of multilingual and multicultural societies, and train “multicultural society coordinators” who can provide an array of benefits to both the university and international relations associations.

At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, a translation team was established on the same day. The university started a Multilingual Disaster Information Support website which translated disaster information into 22 languages. In addition to language volunteers and community interpreters, native speakers and TUFUS alumni living overseas helped ensure the accuracy and speediness of translation. Initially, the university translated disaster information issued by Sendai City. This was followed by translation of basic knowledge related to radiation exposure and announcements from the Immigration Bureau. The university also translated leaflets for a legal consultation hotline run by the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and provided interpretation via 3-way calling. Work was divided in a variety of ways, including online so that studying overseas could ensure that work proceeded even when Japan was experiencing rolling blackouts, etc.

Activities of the Tokubu Region Pacific Offshore Earthquake (later: Great East Japan Earthquake) Multilingual Support Center

Drawing upon experience following the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Niigata Prefecture Chuuetsu Chuuetsu Offshore Earthquake, the National Association of Multicultural Citizenship Managers established the "Tokubu Region Pacific Offshore Earthquake Multilingual Support Center" in the Japan International Affairs and Cooperation Ministry (JIAM) which is located outside of the disaster-affected area. The center was established on the same day that the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred.

Disaster information was transmitted online in Japanese and 9 other languages, and the website was accessed a total of 47,072 times. Telephone consultations were provided via a multilingual hotline which offered support in five languages and other languages. The hotline handled 1,331 cases regarding radiation and requests for support. Staff were also sent to international associations in areas affected by the disasters including Bunki Prefecture and Miyagi Prefecture to assist in the establishment of other multilingual disaster support centers. The center operated from March 11 until April 30, 2011, involving a total of 456 staff members.

Shikoku Prefecture: Disaster-Preparedness Guidebook “Simple Japanese” Edition


In 2011, disaster-related themes were taken up in 5 of the 7 blocks. In addition to reflecting on actions taken after the Great East Japan Earthquake by reviewing examples from the Tohoku region, practical disaster-preparedness training with participation by foreign citizens took place in the Chugoku and Shikoku blocks. Training included creation of evacuation sites that could support foreign residents, establishing and maintaining a multilingual disaster support center, and sending foreign residents participating in the training were staff from local governments, regional international associations, NPOs and other international organizations. Even the general public was encouraged to learn more about how to help support foreign residents in times of emergency.

Three days, foreign residents in Japan for much longer periods of time than before. Instead of viewing foreign residents as “guests” who will someday return home,” Oizumi Town views them as part of the community. The town also seeks to have the community become “guests” who will someday return home,” Oizumi Town views them as part of the community. The town also seeks to have the community become a community by promoting disaster-preparedness and supporting disaster-affected areas.

Training and effective use of personnel to promote “multicultural coexistence”

In March 2006, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication issued its “Multicultural Coexistence Promotion Plan.” In response, CLAIR and HAIM held a seminar in May 2006 to train experts in the topic of “multicultural coexistence.” The seminar was intended for employees of municipalities, regional international associations, and international NPOs throughout Japan. Individuals completing the seminar are accredited as Multicultural Coexistence Managers by CLAIR. These managers are expected to understand systems and issues related to foreign residents and to coordinate, plan, and make proposals together with relevant institutions and government agencies.

Ultimately, the program is expected to amplify support for foreign residents, utilizing the network built after previous disasters, just as in the case of Shizuoka Prefecture’s Earthquake Preparedness Guidebook “Simple Japanese” Edition. The seminar is intended for employees of municipalities, regional international organizations, NPOs and other international organizations. Even the general public was encouraged to learn more about how to help support foreign residents in times of emergency.

Practical disaster-preparedness training held in the Chugoku/Shikoku block

As part of the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) cooperative efforts to encourage multicultural coexistence, all of Japan is divided into several regions, or blocks, that work together. Each block chooses a theme such as education or disaster support, and holds a dialogue with other prefectures within the block on the subject at block meetings.

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Examples of Regional Responses to Disasters and Disaster-Preparedness Activities

- Joint specialized training held by JIAM and JAMP
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/multiculture/jaim/index.html]
- Project for Cooperation in Multicultural Coexistence Efforts
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/multiculture/sokushin/index.html]
- Displacement of Regional Internationalization Promotion Advisors
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/multiculture/sokushin/advisor.html]
- Manual for the Establishment/Operation of Multilingual Support Centers and Disasters
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/multiculture/tagengo/saigai.html]
- Multilingual Information
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/multiculture/renkei/tagengo.html]
- Disaster Support Information for Foreign Residents
  [http://www.clair.or.jp/tabukku/shinsha/]

- Consultation/Inquiries related to activities and events by local governments in this report:
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