

# 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

— Based on the response after Great East Japan Earthquake, etc.

### ① Issues with gathering and awareness of information about foreign residents

There is insufficient information gathered in advance about foreign residents that municipalities could utilize in order to respond appropriately to their needs during a disaster.

### ② Issues with training and utilizing personnel to support multicultural coexistence

There is insufficient utilization of key foreign individuals, training of experts to develop multicultural coexistence during normal times, and multilingual assistance during disasters.

### ③ Issues with partnerships within regions

Among regional international organizations, NPOs, and other parties, there are insufficient partnerships in order to respond to the needs of foreign residents during disasters.

### ④ Issues with partnerships on a prefectural and wider level

There is a limit to how thoroughly a municipalities can respond to foreign residents' needs during a disaster, however, few appropriate support systems have been established.

When considering the possibility of a major disaster, there are insufficient widespread partnerships beyond the prefecture level.

### ⑤ Issues with the system for preparing multilingual information

It is difficult to prepare multilingual translations of procedural or specialized information, much less into minority languages.

There is also insufficient use of "simple Japanese."

### ⑥ Issues with reliable transmission of information

Even if multilingual information is prepared and provided, there is no guarantee that it will reach the people who need it most.

### ⑦ Issues with community involvement by foreign residents during normal times

There is insufficient participation in community activities by foreigners in normal times, as well as insufficient disaster awareness among foreign residents.

## 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.

#### ○ Providing support for municipalities by strengthening partnerships with relevant organizations at the prefectural level

► The prefectural government should support municipalities in addressing issues surrounding the promotion of multicultural coexistence by assessing the actions being taken by each municipality, as well as the status/effect of those actions. They should also raise awareness about multicultural coexistence at the municipal level.

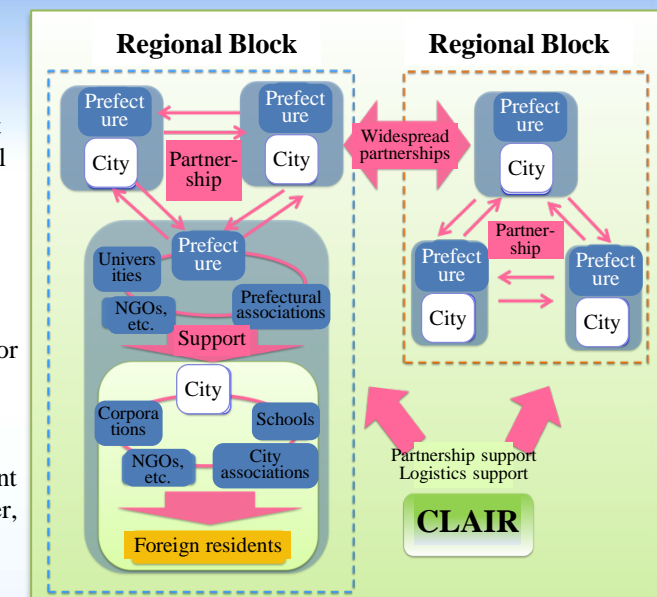
► The prefectural government should form partnerships with relevant organizations and establish a support system to carry out administrative tasks which are difficult for smaller municipalities to handle in an emergency. Examples include the training of experts, dispatchment of human resources from other areas, and the translation/interpretation of disaster-related information.

#### ○ Promotion of partnerships beyond the prefectural level

► Regarding the dispatchment of personnel during disasters, it is necessary to utilize local international associations to form partnerships within the region first. Then, in preparation for widespread disasters, it is necessary to also form partnerships at a wider level between regional blocks.

► CLAIR should attempt to support international associations throughout Japan by providing logistics support for the start-up and operation of multilingual disaster support centers established in each region during disasters, as well as by providing a template for broad partnerships and cooperation between blocks.

► Furthermore, in order to support the activities of municipalities during disasters, it is necessary to continually update the guidelines for the establishment and operation of a multilingual disaster support center, as well as support tools for evacuation centers.



Need for further enhancement of support systems and cooperation

### 4. Greater Provision of Multilingual Information and Utilization of Information in Simple Japanese

► 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.



# Examples of Regional Responses to Disasters and Disaster-Preparedness Activities

## 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 volunteers (including foreign exchange students) and other institutions such as universities, 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, and 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 faxed 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 interpretation in languages with insufficient interpreters, and to handle the increase in administrative work.

## 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 social contributions by promoting the activities of its faculty, staff and graduate student language volunteers, operating a registration system for such volunteers. The university also frequently holds a seminar to train personnel with expert knowledge on the development of multilingual and multicultural societies, and trains "multicultural society coordinators" in a program intended for employees of municipalities and international relations associations. Finally, there is also a program aimed at training individuals with experience in counseling foreigners to be "community interpreters."

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 TUFS 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 translators residing overseas could ensure that work proceeded even when Japan was experiencing rolling blackouts, etc.

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



Drawing upon experience following the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Niigata Prefecture Chuetsu/Chuetsu Offshore Earthquakes, the National Association of Multicultural Coexistence Managers established the "Tohoku Region Pacific Offshore Earthquake Multilingual Support Center" at the Japan Intercultural Academy of Municipalities (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 Japanese and 5 other languages. The hotline handled 133 cases regarding radiation and requests for support. Staff were also sent to international associations in areas affected by the disasters including Ibaraki 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.

## 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.

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 operating multilingual disaster support centers, and visits to evacuation centers. Also 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.

## Shizuoka Prefecture: Earthquake-Preparedness Guidebook "Simple Japanese" Edition

In Shizuoka Prefecture, although multilingual information was transmitted after the Great East Japan Earthquake, there was concern that it would be difficult to respond in the same way if a disaster actually occurred in or near Shizuoka. Furthermore, the very low rate of foreign resident participation in disaster-preparedness training, as well as the difficulty of encouraging awareness of the importance of disaster-preparedness among foreign residents is widely recognized as a problem.

In response, the prefecture decided to focus on foreign residents who are studying Japanese by creating an "Earthquake-Preparedness Guidebook - Simple Japanese Edition." This guidebook allows foreigners to learn about disaster-prevention while studying Japanese.

The guidebook uses easy-to-understand words and phrasing to simply summarize preparations which should be made before an earthquake and actions that should be taken when an earthquake occurs.

In addition to being used as educational material in Japanese classes, the guidebook has been distributed to municipalities and independent disaster-preparedness organizations. It is expected that the book will also be used by Japanese people.

## Oizumi Town's Culture Interpreter Training Project: Foreign-resident volunteers building a community by promoting disaster-preparedness and supporting disaster-affected areas together



These days, foreigners reside 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 a part of the community. The town has created a registry for volunteer Cultural Interpreters, who can convey Japanese customs, systems, and manners to foreign residents in their native language. The town also conducts seminars which enable foreigners to learn about Japanese manners and systems while having fun. For example, there is a "Calligraphy and Japanese Manners Seminar" and a "Japanese Cooking and Basic Trash Separation Seminar."

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Brazilian community expressed their desire to support the disaster-affected areas. In addition to sending aid, supplies and funding, some Brazilian residents also participated in a project to deliver cooked meals to the Tohoku region. In order to ensure that this initiative by foreign residents continues in the future, Oizumi Town formed a volunteer team around the Brazilian residents who have built working relationships with municipal staff during these initial endeavors, and both strive to maintain communication on a daily basis to continue supporting community activities.

## 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 JIAM 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 Multicultural Coexistence Managers from different regions conducted various support activities after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

A seminar for skills-improvement was also held for individuals who completed the original Multicultural Coexistence Manager seminar, during which participants boosted their abilities by sharing the latest information and research on multicultural coexistence, conducted presentations on actual cases by each manager, and exchanged opinions on issues in each region.

In addition, CLAIR has registered various scholars and other individuals who possess expert knowledge and experience in fields such as multicultural coexistence and international cooperation as Regional Internationalization Promotion Advisors. In response to requests from international associations, these experts are sent to seminars and research conferences as speakers to promote understanding and awareness of multicultural coexistence and the importance of international cooperation. Specifically, in addition to giving lectures at seminars to prepare staff to assist foreign residents, advisors also offer instruction on how to identify foreign evacuees' needs and how to provide information to them when visiting evacuation centers during overnight training sessions at a mock evacuation center.

- Joint specialized training held by JIAM and JAMP  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/j/multiculture/jiam/index.html>
- Project for Cooperation in Multicultural Coexistence Efforts  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/j/multiculture/sokushin/ninaite.html>
- Dispatchment of Regional Internationalization Promotion Advisors  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/j/multiculture/sokushin/advisor.html>
- Manual for the Establishment/Operation of Multilingual Support Centers during Disasters  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/j/multiculture/tagengo/saigai.html>
- Multilingual Information  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/j/multiculture/renkei/tagengo.html>
- Disaster Support Information for Foreign Residents  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/tabunka/shinsai/>

■ Inquiries on general contents of this report:  
Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications,  
Municipal Affairs Bureau, International Office  
(Tel : 03-5253-5527  
E-mail : [soumujichi@ml.soumu.go.jp](mailto:soumujichi@ml.soumu.go.jp))

■ Consultation/inquiries related to implementation and activities by local governments in this report:  
CLAIR, Multicultural Coexistence Department  
Multicultural Coexistence Section  
(Tel : 03-5213-1725  
E-mail : [tabunka@clair.or.jp](mailto:tabunka@clair.or.jp))