

Foreign Residents as Key Partners in Disaster Preparedness

災害への備えは、誰にとっても大切なことですが、同じ情報がすべての人にきちんと伝わるとは限りません。日本で暮らす外国人が増える中で、言葉や文化の違いから、災害時に必要な行動が分かりにくい場面もあるようです。こうした課題を受けて、外国人を「支援される側」ではなく、防災とともに支える存在として考える動きが広がっています。地域の防災に外国人住民も参加しやすくするためには、どのような工夫が必要だと思いませんか。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

Disaster preparedness in Japan is being tested by language barriers. In past disasters, many foreign residents and visitors were unfamiliar with disaster-related terms. Local governments trying to support them also lacked staff and budgets. Experts say foreign residents should be seen as supporters who can work with communities to prepare for future emergencies.

About 170 foreigners died in the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. Information on the distribution of relief money and applications for temporary housing was issued in Japanese, leaving many foreign evacuees without sufficient access to support. Those lessons spurred efforts to assist foreign residents during disasters, but more than 30 years on, the situation hasn't changed much.

Akiyoshi Kikuchi, an associate professor of disaster sociology at Meisei University, believes language and cultural differences are **factors**. "Some people may know the word tsunami, but not understand just how dangerous it can be," Kikuchi said.

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Japan Forward

1. Article

Many simply lack knowledge of disasters or evacuation and disaster preparedness. In some cases, providing Japanese translations is not enough to prompt appropriate action

When evacuation stretches over days or weeks, local government support is crucial, including interpreters for administrative [procedures](#). But the level of assistance varies widely by region. One key [institution](#) is the multilingual disaster support center, through which local governments dispatch multilingual interpreters to shelters, translate disaster-related information, and provide updates in plain Japanese.

But a 2024 [survey](#) by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications found that fewer than 10% of local governments, especially small municipalities, had systems to establish such centers during a crisis. "In small municipalities, officials may understand that support is needed, but they often have limited human resources and, in many cases, no budget," Kikuchi said. "The national government needs to provide support in training personnel and funding," she added.

Major disasters can hit without warning. Against that backdrop, Kikuchi calls for strengthening "[multicultural](#) disaster preparedness" by treating foreign residents as participants in local disaster readiness and as community members.

According to Kikuchi, more foreign residents are joining volunteer fire corps. Foreign residents also often understand issues that Japanese communities may overlook, from language and cultural differences to religious taboos. "Helping foreign residents during disasters is important, but we also need to think about how communities can help one another," she said. "What matters is whether those relationships are built in ordinary times."

Some began taking action themselves. Andrew Mitchell, a British-born assistant professor at Kumamoto University, founded KEEP with fellow international students after experiencing the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes. The group promotes disaster preparedness among foreign residents. "Many foreign residents have never received disaster training in their home countries and tend to think disasters have nothing to do with them," Mitchell said. His own experience in the Kumamoto earthquakes now informs his efforts to raise disaster awareness.

On the night of April 14, 2016, his apartment in Kumamoto City shook violently. Terrified, he pulled a mattress over his head for protection. During the stronger main shock two days later, he evacuated to Kumamoto University with a Japanese student from a neighboring room. The gymnasium was already full, so they spent the night outside.

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1. Article

Mitchell could converse in everyday Japanese, but he said he did not know where to evacuate or know the meaning of *hinanjo*, “evacuation shelter.” Rumors were also spreading online that a nearby bridge had collapsed. “I was anxious because I didn't know how to get accurate information,” he recalled.

Nearly 10 years after founding KEEP, Mitchell continues sharing information on social media and speaking at events hosted by local governments and disaster-preparedness groups. He urges international students and technical trainees to take everyday precautions, such as carrying portable chargers, and encourages them to join local disaster drills.

Overseas residents now number more than 4 million and come from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Mitchell stressed the importance of building relationships that allow people to help one another when language is a barrier. “Preparedness can save your life and the lives of your family, friends, and colleagues—but allows you to help your community,” he said.

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2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. factor 要因

Several **factors** influenced Chris's decision to change jobs.

2. procedure 手続き

You must follow the correct **procedure** to apply for the work visa.

3. institution 機関

The science research **institution** published a new report on climate change.

4. survey 調査

The tour company conducted a **survey** to understand customer needs better.

5. multicultural 多文化の

The school promotes a **multicultural** environment where students learn from each other.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What main problem do foreign residents face during disasters in Japan?
2. What was the experience of Andrew Mitchell during the Kumamoto earthquake? Please explain in your own words.
3. What suggestions do associate professors Kikuchi and Mitchell give to prepare for future disasters?
4. How can communities include foreign residents in disaster preparedness?
5. What action can you take in everyday life to prepare for disasters?

4. 外国人を防災担い手に 「多文化」強化で弱者から転換

国内に住む外国人やインバウンドの増加に伴い、言語や習慣の違いを踏まえた防災の在り方が問われている。平成28年の熊本地震など過去の災害では、防災用語を理解できず困惑するケースが多く、自治体も人手や財政面で支援に限界がある。専門家は、外国人を「災害弱者」ではなく「防災の担い手」と位置付け、共に備える重要性を指摘する。

阪神大震災では約170人の外国人が犠牲となり、情報が日本語中心だったため十分に行き渡らなかった。この教訓から支援の取り組みは進んだが、30年以上たった現在も、外国人が災害時に弱者となりやすい状況は大きく変わっていない。

明星大の菊池哲佳准教授は、背景に言語と文化の違いがあるとし、「津波という言葉を知っていても危険性を理解できない場合がある」と指摘する。災害に不慣れな外国人も多く、単なる翻訳では適切な行動につながらないこともある。避難生活が長期化すれば通訳など自治体の関与が重要になるが、対応には地域差がある。

災害時に通訳派遣や情報翻訳を担う「災害多言語支援センター」について、総務省調査では整備済みの自治体は1割未満の163にとどまり、小規模自治体ほど遅れが目立つ。

菊池氏は、人材や予算の不足を指摘し、国の支援の必要性を訴える。また、南海トラフ地震など大規模災害に備え、「多文化防災」の強化を提言。外国人を地域防災の担い手とし、共生を進めるべきだとする。実際に消防団に参加する外国人も増えており、文化や宗教の違いは当事者だからこそ理解できる側面もある。「どう助け合うかという視点と、平時からの関係づくりが重要だ」と強調する。

熊本地震を経験した英国出身のアンドリュー・ミッチェルさんは、外国人向け防災団体「KEEP」を設立。「災害訓練の経験がない外国人は多く、自分には関係ないと思いがち」と語る。地震当時は避難先も分からず、情報の真偽にも不安を感じたという。

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出典：外国人を防災担い手に 「多文化」強化で弱者から転換
[Japan Forward](#)

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現在はSNS発信や講演を通じて、防災意識の向上や日頃の備え、地域訓練への参加を呼びかける。日本の外国人は400万人を超え多様化しており、「備えは自分や周囲の命を守り、コミュニティーにも貢献できる」と協力関係の重要性を強調している。



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