

Reducing the Vulnerability of Foreign-Born Individuals to Disasters: A Comparison of Japanese and Australian Disaster Preparedness Policies and Programs for Ethnically Diverse Communities

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Scholars and policymakers around the world are increasingly interested in the impact of disasters on foreign-born residents and ethnic minorities. In Japan, the central and local governments have introduced several initiatives to minimize the impact of hazards such as earthquakes, typhoons and flooding on the growing number of residents and visitors from abroad. After earthquakes in Kumamoto and Hokkaido, however, some in Japan have called on the government to do more to support non-Japanese residents and tourists during, and in the aftermath of emergencies (Multilingual support vital for foreigners in times of disaster 2018; Japan must improve its disaster services for foreigners 2018). These concerns echo those of scholars looking at social vulnerability. Recognizing how inequality in society affects the impact of disaster, the concept of social vulnerability has become important to the study of disasters. Many researchers agree that many foreign-born individuals suffer more than the general population following an emergency because of fewer financial resources, weaker social support networks, and lower levels of literacy in the majority language (Tierney 2019). As the number of newcomers in Japan unfamiliar with local hazards grows, officials must do more to support these groups. It may be useful, therefore, to examine how countries with a longer history of receiving migrants have dealt with the challenge of preparedness.

This paper compares a selection of disaster-related policies and programs designed to protect foreigners in two disaster-prone countries, Japan and Australia. Although only a few studies published in English have examined the impact of disasters on non-Japanese (i.e. (Gómez 2013)), Australian scholars have long recognized the need to examine diverse communities (i.e. (Mitchell 2003; Crawford et al. 2013; Shepherd and van Vuuren 2014)). This paper aims to identify similarities and differences in the approaches and the actions of the two countries in supporting such populations. The following questions were addressed:

- How do Australia and Japan define the problem of disaster management for foreign-born residents and citizens?
- To what extent has Japan considered foreigners in its disaster preparedness policies and programs?
- To what extent has Australia considered culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations in its disaster preparedness policies and programs?
- To what extent are the policies and programs in the two countries similar, and how are they different?

Based on methods adapted from Andrulis et al.(2007), a sample of websites, government agency reports, local government disaster plans, and local government multicultural plans in Japan and Australia were selected and reviewed. After that, policies and programs targeting the needs of foreign-born residents and visitors were identified and classified.

The main finding was that while wealthier cities with large foreign populations in Japan, such as Tokyo, have introduced multilingual resources guides, risk communication, training and education, such commitment varies by municipality. Meanwhile, since 2001, Australia has supplemented similar state and local-level initiatives with national-level Guidelines for Emergency Management to assist the emergency management sector to work proactively with local CALD groups. A significant departure from the Japanese approach, these guidelines acknowledge that such communities demonstrate resilience, possess experiences and skills in dealing with emergencies, and can be a valuable resource before, during or after an emergency. The potential – and the

challenges - of implementing more promising disaster-related policies and programs targeting foreign-born individuals in Japan and Australia are discussed.

Citations

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