

Event Report for “KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA” Symposium

～Co-creating the future of Toyama～

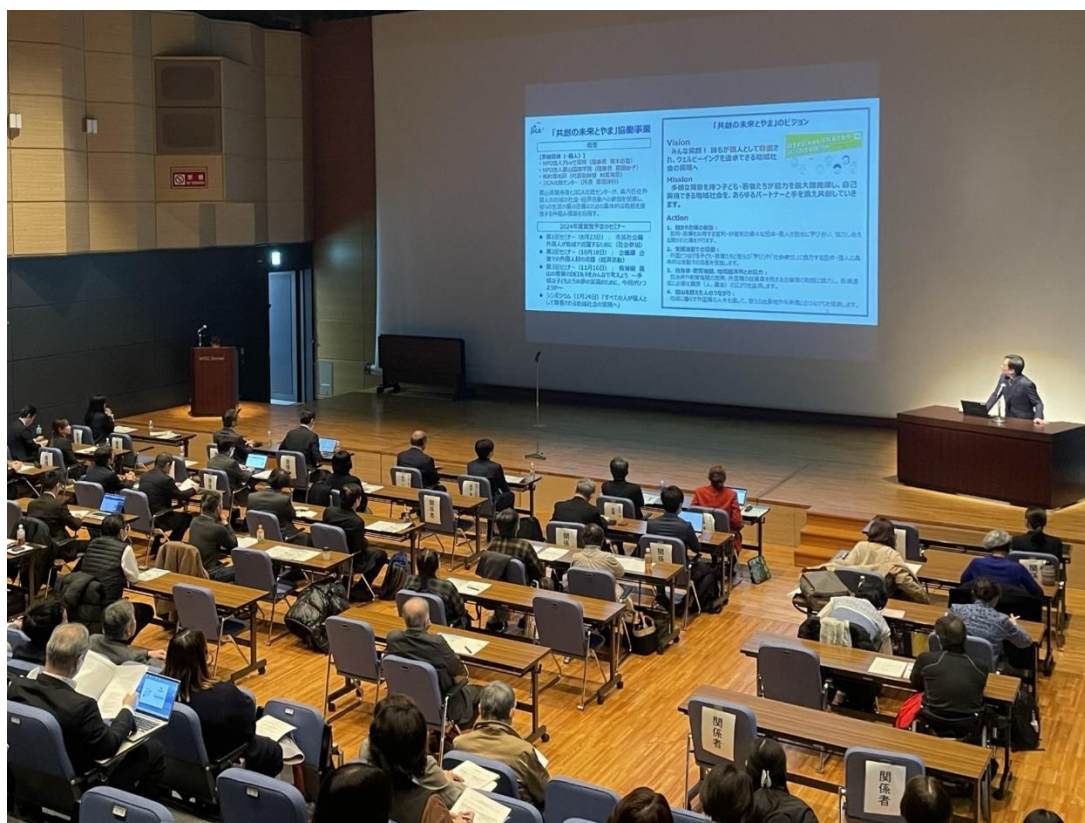
【First Half】

*Toward the realization of a community where all people are respected as individuals -
Potential of Co-creation Network-*

Since the project's launch in August last year, "KYOSO no MIRAI TOYAMA" (Co-creating the future of Toyama), which is organized by volunteers (both organizations and companies) in Toyama Prefecture and JICA Hokuriku, has held three seminars on the themes of "civil society," "business," and "education." On January 24, a symposium was held to summarize the project, and more than 100 people from inside and outside the prefecture attended.

This was a good opportunity to think together with everyone in the audience about what is needed to create communities and societies that are rich in diversity and can turn "differences" into "strengths."

* [For the symposium's program, see here.](#)



The symposium had two pillars: (1) a keynote speech and (2) a panel discussion. The keynote speaker was Mr. Taro Tamura, Representative Director of the Institute for Human Diversity Japan, and the keynote's theme was "Forming an intercultural society and Future community building." Through this speech, we examined the local communities we live in with a focus on interculturalism.

■ Changing the way we view foreign residents

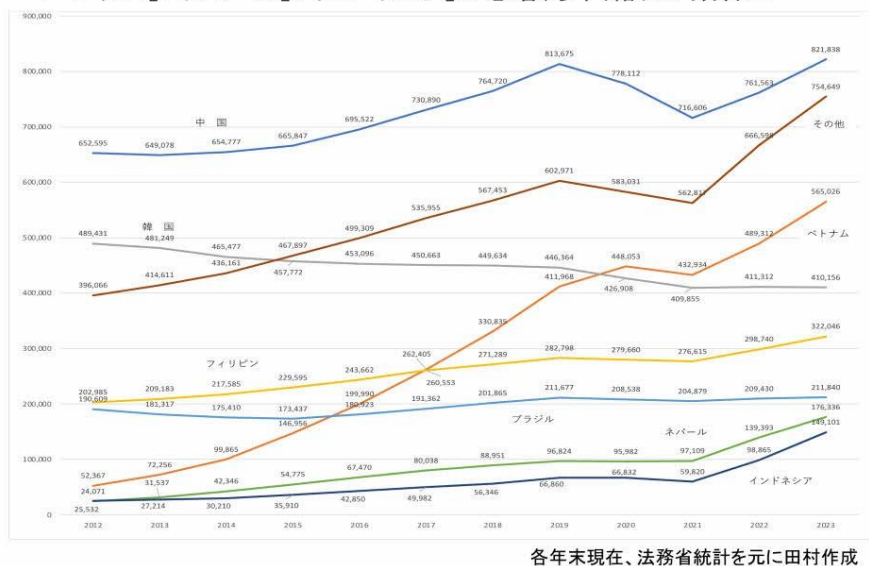
~ "People who will live here for a long time" rather than "people who will eventually go home" ~

These days, even in Toyama, you see more and more foreign residents in the local community—at schools, in shops, and elsewhere. If you go to an urban area like Tokyo, you can truly feel that the number of foreign nationals is increasing. What do you think about them?

At the beginning of his speech, Mr. Tamura touched on the "diversification" of foreign residents. In Japan, people from overseas are often referred to simply as "foreigners." However, when you take a closer look, you can see that there is increasing diversity in all aspects, including in terms of (1) nationality, (2) residence status, (3) generation, (4) place of residence, and (5) economic situation.

国籍別在留外国人数の推移

- ・「ベトナム」「ネパール」「インドネシア」が急増、多国籍化が顕著に



In fact, trends in nationality (as of the end of 2024, compiled by Mr. Tamura from Ministry of Justice statistics) show that the greatest number of foreigners come from China (about 820,000), followed by Vietnam (about 560,000), South Korea (about 410,000), the Philippines (about 320,000), and

Brazil (about 210,000), but when the numbers for the seventh and lower ranks are aggregated into "others," this is the second largest group (about 750,000) after China. In other words, the "multinationalization" of foreign residents is progressing.

As for the residence statuses of foreign residents, more than three-fourths of the total population is made up of qualified individuals who can bring their families with them. The population by generation has increased across all age groups, with the peak in the 20s age range. As the number of foreign residents who are bringing their families to Japan to live with them increases, greater consideration and measures will naturally be required not only for "employment" but for all aspects of daily life, including "living" and "education." Though meeting such diversifying needs is a challenge, the constructive participation of foreign residents is now essential to maintain our social and economic activities.

"If we do not achieve interculturalism, we will perish."

These are Mr. Tamura's powerful words. His stern warning was that if we see foreigners merely as "temporary residents (*tabinohito* ("travelers") in the Toyama dialect) who lend us their labor," there is no room for the development of Japanese society. What we can do, he said, is to first **"change the way we view"** foreign residents. Needless to say, it is also necessary to change various policies.



Mr. Taro Tamura, Representative Director, Institute for Human Diversity Japan

■ Diversity policies to realize a sustainable society

"Interculturalism (diversity) is not synonymous with supporting foreign nationals. Though interculturalism includes supporting foreign residents, it involves changing the entire community. It is about **building consensus** to make our community sustainable with the help of foreign residents."

Mr. Tamura pointed out that the challenges of the SDGs can be broadly divided into two categories, namely "climate change" (natural challenges and threats) and "population change" (social challenges). In Europe and East Asia, including in Japan, populations continue to decrease. Meanwhile, in India and Africa, populations continue to grow. Japan, with its rapidly aging population and declining birthrate, is one of the countries most affected by this population change, and to cope with this, a **"human diversity-conscious society (=diversity)" is necessary**. Why is diversity so important? Mr. Tamura continued:

"Rather than telling foreigners that they can make more money if they come to Japan, we need to pull (using factors of the host country) them to come, telling them that their **lives will be richer** if they come to Japan."

Now that the economic growth of Asian countries that have been sending workers to Japan has progressed and wage gaps have narrowed, the tendency for people to leave their countries (push) is weakening, and conversely, the tendency to invite (pull) is spreading throughout Asia. As other countries are launching efforts to secure human resources, it goes without saying that people will no longer choose Japan (Toyama) solely based on "wages." When the pull factor for immigration is "enrichment of life" rather than "economic wealth," it becomes increasingly important for society to be tolerant of diversity. Mr. Tamura cited examples of other countries' policies for accepting foreign residents, and stated that it is imperative to build consensus with local residents in order to show the way from the stages of "exclusion" and "discrimination" to the stage of "coexistence." Toyama Prefecture is currently working to enact an ordinance aiming to realize a society in which foreign residents can coexist with local residents, and is planning to revise the "Toyama Prefecture Plan to Promote the Active Use of Foreign Talent and Multicultural Coexistence" that was formulated in 2019.

■ Fostering local "workers" and "promoters" of interculturalism is a pressing need!

Japan is facing labor shortages in various industries. Trying to haphazardly cover these labor shortages with cheap foreign labor will not lead to a fundamental solution. Mr. Tamura commented

on what acceptance of foreign nationals should be like in the future:

"We must shift to technological innovation and high-value-added industries, and position foreign personnel not as cheap labor but as **providers of innovation**."

Additionally, for foreign residents to play active roles, it is necessary to establish social infrastructure that supports interculturalism, such as **guaranteeing opportunities to learn the Japanese language** and **providing livelihood support services**, but the challenge is that there is an overwhelming **lack of promoters of interculturalism** in Japan. Mr. Tamura cited the example of NPOs in Europe and the U.S., which are often commissioned by the government and run by people with immigrant roots, and noted that NPOs and NGOs that can provide fine-tuned support beyond what can be provided by the government and corporations will be instrumental in promoting diversity policies.

NPOs and NGOs that can meet the diverse needs of foreigners are, in the words of Mr. Tamura, "the ones that can get things done." The hope is that these highly specialized organizations will grow stronger and collaborate with the government and private companies.

■ The key to a society of coexistence is "tolerance"

The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was revised in June 2024 to abolish the Technical Intern Training Program and newly establish the Employment for Skill Development program. This new system, which aims to secure and develop human resources, is scheduled to launch in 2027.

"This will effectively put an end to migrant work and increase the number of long-term foreign residents living in Japan."

Mr. Tamura quoted American urbanist Richard Florida to declare that economic growth requires three "T's."

- * Technology
- * Talent
- * **Tolerance**

Of these, Mr. Tamura said that "tolerance" is indispensable to realize a society of coexistence. This is not limited to foreigners; it applies to everyone. If there is a climate of tolerance toward people of various backgrounds, such a society is indeed "free, tolerant, and comfortable." A town that is

comfortable to work in, easy to live in, and safe is attractive. It is certain that the number of foreign residents in our town will increase in the future. To live together with people of different nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds, we must accept our differences and change ourselves. Mr. Tamura's speech also reminded us that in order to turn "differences" into innovation, it is essential to collaborate with all partners, including the government, companies, organizations, and individuals. Thank you, Mr. Tamura.

The full version of Mr. Tamura's speech is available on the official JICA channel on YouTube, where you can hear episodes from the engaging speech that cannot be fully reported here.

* The panel discussion that followed Mr. Tamura's keynote speech is reported separately in "Second Half."

【Program】

14:30 ~14:35	Opening address	Hiroyuki Tomita - Director General, Hokuriku Center, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
14:35 ~14:40	Governor's speech	Hachiro Nitta - Governor, Toyama Prefecture
14:40 ~14:50	Speech for Objective of the Symposium	Mayara Nagata - ALECE Takaoka, NPO
14:50 ~15:40	Keynote Speech Forming an intercultural society and Future community building ~How we create a sustainable society in which diverse actor collaborate with each other~	Taro Tamura - Representative Director, Institute for Human Diversity Japan
15:40 ~15:50	~Break~	
15:50 ~16:40	Panel Discussion *Facilitator: Taro Tamura How to Turn “Differences” into “Power” -What we need for a community where people from diverse backgrounds can aim for self-fulfillment?	Taeko Miyata - Representative Director, Diversity Toyama, NGO Hidehiko Murao - CEO, Murao Chiken, Co., Ltd. Mayara Nagata / Yuka Aoki - ALECE Takaoka, NPO Masaki Miyazawa - International healthcare study group KIK, Toyama University Everson Esteques Lemos - YKK Corporation Hiroyuki Tomita - Director General, Hokuriku Center, JICA
16:40 ~16:50	Feedback	Masakatsu Murotani - Director, Southwest Asia Division, Southeast and Southwest Asian Affairs Department, Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
16:50 ~17:00	Closing address	Hiroyuki Kobayashi - Senior Vice President, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)