

# Report on the current situation of Communities of Japanese Immigrants and Descendants ("Nikkei") in Central and South America (Summary)

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## 1. Size of Nikkei Communities

Although the size of the Nikkei population recognized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to differ somewhat from its actual size, it is difficult to know the exact number as there are no clear-cut definitions of "Nikkei". Additionally, there has been little on-site research.

## 2. Generational Breakdown of Nikkei

Even in Brazil, first generation Nikkei only consist of a few to 20 percent of the whole Nikkei population in the country today. By generational composition, the Nikkei population is mostly comprised of the second to fourth generations and the fifth generation, with the second and third generations being the predominant generations. The active age group is starting to shift from the second and the third generations to the fourth generation.

## 3. Nikkei Associations

There are associations in countries with a large Nikkei population. In Brazil, there are associations for each field of activity and region. However, there is no structure to oversee other associations nation-wide.

While Kenjinkai (associations of people from a particular prefecture) exist in many countries and regions, some of them are no longer active. Cultural and sport associations are more likely to be active and involved in a variety of activities in places with a larger Nikkei population. Demand for welfare organizations is increasing.

## 4. Activities with the Involvement of Nikkei Communities

The second generation is taking over from the first generation as representatives. There are more associations with the second or younger generations acting as executives of the group nowadays. There are only few female leaders. However, women's clubs seem to be active.

Occupations held by the Nikkei population are diverse. The number of people working in agriculture is decreasing and there is a relatively low number engaged in manufacturing. While many work in commerce, there is an increase in the number of people working as skilled workers, office clerks, and public servants. The fact that Nikkei seen on TV are active in political, public, and business communities, or the entertainment and sport communities, indicates this diversity in occupations.

Nikkei who have little interest in Nikkei communities and barely identify themselves as Nikkei are increasing. On the other hand, some see it as a natural course of events that Nikkei distance themselves from Nikkei communities since there are few incentives for belonging to Nikkei associations in urbanized areas compared to the past and the autonomous communities where Nikkei initially settled, arguing that just because someone does not belong to Nikkei associations does not mean they do not identify as a Nikkei.

Sometimes younger Nikkei generations are "awakened" by external factors. Pop culture, participating in Japanese

cultural events, visiting Japan and learning the Japanese language are some good examples.

It is important to involve non-Nikkei, share expertise in succeeding to get younger generations to become active, and get diplomatic missions abroad to provide assistance (participation by members of missions, upgrading facilities, and giving out awards) to keep Nikkei communities vibrant.

## 5 Japanese Language Education

A significant number of Japanese schools are scattered in a majority of countries, and some of them even have a library. Many of the students are non-Nikkei and it is clear that these schools rely heavily on non-Nikkei to teach the language as well.

In terms of providing assistance to Japanese language education, while there is a high demand for dispatching Japanese instructors, there is relatively little demand for sending language text books. Other ideas include taking advantage of free text books distributed by the Japanese government, hosting speech competitions, and utilizing the internet.

## 6. Nikkei Media

Nikkei media targeted at the Nikkei population exist in the 8 regions where there is a Japanese diplomatic mission. While traditional forms of media (newspapers) are losing momentum, new forms of media, such as the internet, has not been developed sufficiently.

## 7. Connection with Japan

1) Japanese Corporations: Relationships between Japanese corporates and Nikkei communities are often shaped on a bias-free basis, and views towards Nikkei communities vary from corporation to corporation.

2) Local Municipalities: While events such as governors' visits to commemorate an anniversary, and exchange programs between sister cities and prefectures take place, some of them are only courtesy visits with little significant exchange.

3) Study Abroad: There are still many Nikkei youths who wish to study abroad in Japan, and their options include not only state-funded study abroad, but also prefecture-funded study abroad (especially in countries with a high ratio of Japanese descendants) and training by JICA intended for Nikkei. Overall, at least three quarters of prefectures accept Nikkei in their state-funded study abroad or training programs.

4) Visits to Japan: The number of Nikkei who visit Japan has been steady or on an increase for the past five years, and a majority of them are second or third generations. Reasons for visiting Japan are diverse, including study abroad to vacation, as well as work.

5) Sentiment among Nikkei who have worked in Japan: Each returnee has a different view towards his or her experience of working in Japan. It no longer makes sense to generalize all of their experiences and sentiments as so-called "migrant workers."

## 8. Issues, Challenges, and Ideas

1) There is no single common challenge shared by Nikkei in Central and South America. Their challenges include  
*\* This report is a summary of questionnaires given to Japanese diplomatic missions in 23 countries in Central and South America (33 Embassies, Consulates General, and Consulate offices) regarding "Actual Status of Nikkei Communities in Central and South America" from November through December of 2016.*

political issues depending on which country or region they reside in, status in general societies, and lack of collaboration between Nikkei associations. Japanese diplomatic missions abroad often hear requests and opinions from Nikkei communities regarding legal systems such as nationality, visa, and family registration.

2) The following ideas have been suggested to revitalize exchange between Nikkei and Japan.

- Taking advantage of Japanese festivals and anniversary events
- Cross-border collaboration among Nikkei communities
- Enhanced output of information
- Creating more opportunities to visit Japan (including homestay and working holiday)
- More active appointment of Nikkei in Japanese corporations where they can make good use of their skills

## 9. Conclusion

It is important to set forth policies regarding Nikkei based on various circumstances that differ by country depending on the size and history of its Nikkei associations. Consideration should be given to insights from diplomatic missions such as the following:

- Definition of “Nikkei” is ambiguous. Asking someone “what generation of Nikkei are you?” no longer makes much sense
- Disrupted relations between Nikkei who returned to Japan and Nikkei communities
- “Nikkei identity” perceived by the Japanese side differs from that of Nikkei
- More attention should be given to the voice of Nikkei
- More recognition should be given to the fact that Nikkei communities are building a network beyond borders through events such as the Pan-American Nikkei Convention and sports

(End)