



01 Oct. 2016 Initiative Nippon in Shinjuku: Acceptance of Foreign Residents

The fifth regional meeting of the Initiative Nippon project was co-hosted by the Outlook Foundation and Shinjuku-ku on Saturday, October 1 in Shinjuku Sangyo Kaikan (BIZ Shinjuku). More than 20 participants including members of local organizations and businesses, a merchant association, a school, a Japanese language NPO, neighborhood associations, foreign residents and other stakeholders in foreign resident issues engaged with the hosts in vigorous discussion.



At the beginning of the meeting, Mayor Kenichi Yoshizumi of Shinjuku-ku expressed the urgent need for discussion on acceptance of foreign residents and emphasized the importance of national government leadership. He asserted that the government should take the initiative in determining policy, and then Shinjuku would discuss measures based on that policy. Regarding the compulsory requirement of Japanese language instruction for foreign residents, he

supported the idea of mandatory language and cultural education, as our official language is Japanese.

During the discussion, some participants pointed out the difficulties in offering greater opportunities to foreign students who are already familiar with Shinjuku and Japan. Many foreigners who wish to start a business in Japan do not have qualified resident status. For example, foreign graduates of Japanese beautician schools cannot work as beauticians here. Many examples of resident status issues were presented.

Regarding healthcare, Dr. Tomida, who operates a clinic in Takadanobaba, said that approximately 60% of clinics who treated foreign patients have experienced payment defaults. Some foreign residents with poor access to hospitals do not seek help until their conditions are severe, which results in higher, prohibitive fees. The language problem also frustrates doctors. By providing interpreters, Kanagawa Prefecture has succeeded in reducing payment default by foreign patients by 90%, suggesting that language education can offer a solution to the payment issue. We also learned about an interesting initiative by Suwa-cho, which is engaged in a pilot project of third country residency for refugees.



I would like to express my gratitude to participants from Shinjuku and other areas who dedicated their weekend to this meeting. I also thank the members of the Multicultural Society Promotion Division of Shinjuku-ku.