

Multilevel Governance, Community, and Emergency Management during the Pandemic:

Migrants in Japan

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged governance for migrants in labor markets across countries. Japan's national government adopted some ad hoc emergency measures for the entire population, filtering them through local governments. For foreign migrants, national authority over visa conditions affected migrants' formal eligibility to work and access to social supports. Local communities, on the other hand, recognized some workers as community members more than others, due not just to differences in visa status or length of residence, but also to their community tie. The pandemic experience reveals how differences in local membership and governance, partly influenced by national regulations, affected responses to migrants during the pandemic.

Building on perspectives from the study of multilevel governance, migrants' inclusion, and emergency management, this article asks how differences across national regulations for foreign residents, work eligibility, and access to national emergency supports during the pandemic intersected with local approaches in responding to migrants in Japan. Different national rules characterized the three groups of migrants studied: international students, technical interns, and co-ethnic migrants with long-term visas (mainly Brazilians and Peruvians). National policies obstructed or enabled migrants' treatment as members of the local community but did not dictate this membership. By examining articles from a selection of regional newspapers in Japan from April 1 to October 1, 2020, this article reveals how news media reflected the respective needs and local support activities for three groups of labor migrants. Community responses involved governance relationships that went beyond "government," to include networks of public and private actors working together.

In an emergency such as the pandemic, multilevel governance ought to provide a setting for responding flexibly, but potential exists for tension between national border control policies and meeting needs of foreign residents. Even if emergency adjustments are made in national regulations, these take time, and migrants' needs are more urgent and require an immediate response that local public and private groups can more likely provide. Furthermore, national policies do not recognize migrants as members in the same way that local communities do, as membership is likely to be affected by the social context and not just national rules.

Situating the Question

Scholarly debate on multilevel responses in emergencies suggests that local governance will be more flexible than national government policies in responding to urgent situations. Work on the relationship between multilevel governance and emergency management reveals a complex picture. The picture becomes even more nuanced when it involves the relationship of migrants to the local community.

Multilevel Governance

The idea of multilevel governance has become applicable to countries beyond Europe and North America. Whether related to developing more effective and efficient program delivery, establishing inclusive governance, or addressing fiscal deficits, its use has been broad, subsuming frameworks such as federalism, intergovernmental relations, decentralization, devolution, and collaborative governance (Hooghe et al., 2010, Hooghe and Marks, 2003, Krahmman, 2003, Piattoni, 2005). Scholarship addressing responses to crises in the multilevel context has tended to focus on explaining local governments' policy responses, but some address institutional functioning (Conversi and Jeram, 2017, Del Pino and Ramos, 2018, Bello and Bloom, 2017).

Because “governance” is different from “government,” the flexibility of multilevel governance should matter in rapidly changing environments. For Jon Pierre, “governance” refers to a governing approach that involves interactive communications and negotiations that respond to the surrounding environment, not vertical jurisdictional differences in government (Pierre, 2012). Governance networks include “interdependent but operationally autonomous actors who interact through negotiations that take place within a relatively institutionalized framework” (Torfing et al., 2012, p.16, Kapucu et al., 2009). These patterns of interaction accompany the perspective highlighted by Hooghe and Marks (2003) that “dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is *more flexible* than concentration of governance in one jurisdiction” (p.235). Flexibility enables adapting but is not a substitute for governmental regulations. For Pierre, the benefits of flexibility in governance co-exist with the benefits of governmentally-created rules (Pierre, 2012).

Japan’s balance between national policies, multilevel policies, and governance has been uneven and varies by policy. Its multilevel governmental system includes forty-seven prefectures, twenty cities with populations over 500,000 possessing special authority close to that of a prefecture, and municipalities; these territorially-based jurisdictions incorporate locally-developed governance networks. In the 1990s and 2000s, local governments took on greater shared authority with the national government and civil society organizations took on a larger role (Nakamura, 1998, Ikawa, 2008, Pekkanen, 2006). Depending on the policy and their resources, local initiatives and network coordination have grown up. For instance, for students whose first language is not English, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) allocates a special budget for this purpose, but prefectures develop programs and standards, assisting local governments with their implementation. Prefectures and

municipalities may also allocate funds and teachers beyond those provided nationally and obtain special grants to develop innovative programs that include civil society (Milly, 2014).

Multilevel Governance for Migrants

Multilevel governance for migrants' inclusion and welfare influences how migrants are incorporated as members in subnational communities due to local characteristics such as politics, fiscal capacities, and industry (Huang and Liu, 2018). Local governments may advocate with the national state for migrants' inclusion and develop their own policies for migrants as local community members (Gebhardt, 2016, Paquet, 2020, Schmidtke, 2021, Ricardo, 2020). Some studies have begun to identify a divergence between national and subnational approaches in crisis conditions (Poppelaars and Scholten, 2008, Bešić et al., 2021, Takenoshita, 2017).

Multi-level governance can be important for including migrants as community members, given that local administrators frequently see themselves as responsible for *all* residents in the jurisdiction (Williamson, 2018). Local citizenship as membership also incorporates social life beyond the political domain, and governance networks create what Bloemraad terms "social mobilization networks" that intervene to affect how national policies for immigrants work in practice (Bloemraad, 2006, Bosniak, 2006).

According to Erin Chung (2020), in East Asian democracies, besides visa status, a legacy of civic activism is a core determinant of inclusion. She demonstrates that the history of local civic activism in Japan has contributed to positioning foreign residents as community members. Other authors have addressed the issue of local citizenship for migrants in Japan, whether as part of a bottom-up or top-down dynamic (Tarumoto, 2003, Tsuda, 2006, Aiden, 2011, Nagy, 2013).

Multilevel Governance and the Pandemic

Some researchers have treated the pandemic as an emergency or a disaster involving multilevel governance. Downey and Myers (2020) point out that when disasters occur, “emergency response is a primarily local responsibility” (p. 528). Although this makes sense because most disasters are localized, the authors recognize an overarching national or federal framework may assist in the response. Dzigbede et al. find that “preparedness for weather-related natural disasters” has influenced local governments’ leadership in responding to the pandemic (Dzigbede et al., 2020, p.634). McDonald, Goodman, and Hatch also approach the covid-19 response in terms of “emergency management” as situated in the US “intergovernmental system” (McDonald et al., 2020).

Even if prior cases provide a template for responding to new emergencies, there is no guarantee that local responses will be adequate: national policies may still play an important role. Barriers to collaboration may exist across different policy silos, such as emergency management and public health, and other obstacles may also emerge to block vertical and horizontal coordination (Wolf-Fordham, 2020, Caruson and MacManus, 2012). Furthermore, Lane and Hesselman (2017) note that in multilevel governance of disaster responses, “Unfortunately, disaster governance is commonly characterized as patchy, fragmented and inadequate, leading to essential protection gaps for affected communities” (p. 93). Work by Kapucu and Abdul-Akeem (2016) on local responses after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 supports that concern. In examining the effectiveness of local governments’ pandemic responses, Dzigbede et al. (2020) find that pre-existing vertical relationships with officials at other levels matter.

Japanese national and local governments have had ample experience with emergencies, even without migration policies being involved. Disaster responses have drawn on existing networks or led to the spontaneous formation of local government and civil society networks,

especially when the national response was inadequate or too slow. Civil society groups and businesses buttressed the response to the Great Earthquake of 1995 in western Japan (Pekkanen, 2000, Takao, 1998, Takao, 2001, Takezawa, 2007). Networks among local governments and civil society were critical after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant disasters of March 2011 (Samuels, 2013). Naomi Aoki finds that for those disasters “the success of wide-area collaboration hinges on the success of both horizontal (interlocal) and vertical (inter-governmental)” interactions (Aoki, 2015, p. 196).

Based on the above discussions, multilevel governance should have made it possible to respond flexibly to migrants’ needs during the pandemic, but vertical relationships would have also mattered. Flexibility would depend on the relationships among national border control policies, national support provisions, and local community support networks to meet the needs of foreign residents. But this raises the question of whether and how national policies obstructed or enabled migrants’ membership in the local community.

Situating Migrants in Japan

Migrant Groups

For Japanese policymakers, employers, and foreign migrants, the pandemic upended the situation of 2019. In 2019, the government embarked on expanding options for hiring foreign migrants to meet the steadily growing labor shortages across most sectors. Fourteen sectors accounted for the most severe shortages, among them, agriculture and food processing, aviation, construction, industrial manufacturing, nursing care, hotels, and restaurants (Japan International Trainee and Skilled Worker Cooperation Organization, 2022).

Until the pandemic, employment migration to Japan had steadily grown due to the shrinking population and the consequent heightened demand for labor. At the end of 2019, the

foreign-resident population was 2.9 million foreign residents or 2.32% of the total population. Chinese, Koreans, and Vietnamese were the three largest nationalities residing in Japan (Japan Immigration Services Agency, 2020, Part 1, pp. 27-28). Visas of those working in Japan include many distinctions, but general categories include status visas and visas for a special purpose or activity, such as employment, training, or study. Status visas include those given to long-term residents, permanent residents, and spouses and children of Japanese citizens and permanent residents. These do not designate a specific activity or purpose for residing in Japan and enable those who possess them to freely enter and leave employment. At the end of 2019, 51% of foreign residents held status visas, and the remaining 49% had visas for work or study or were dependents (Japan Immigration Services Agency, 2020, Part 1, p. 30). According to an annual survey of employers by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in October 2020, 1.72 million foreign residents were working: 20% in professional or skilled jobs, 23% as technical interns, 19% as international students, and 30% holding status visas. The largest nationality groups working were Vietnamese (26% of the total) and Chinese (24%) (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2021).

Co-ethnics have special access to one form of status visa, the *long-term visa*, which requires regular renewals. The visa has become especially associated with co-ethnic *Brazilians* and *Peruvians*, although other co-ethnics also use it. Brazilians and Peruvians account for only 9.3% of foreign workers, but 99% hold status visas and have flexibility in changing employment. Creation of the long-term visa in 1990 triggered an increase in Brazilian and Peruvian residents, and the visa became an indirect method of work migration for those who could demonstrate Japanese family ties and satisfy other conditions. By 1993, almost 155,000 Brazilians of Japanese descent had acquired this visa (Milly, 2014, p. 65). Subsequent easing of visa

requirements combined with economic ups and downs resulted in a change in the profile of nationalities with this visa. By June 30, 2021, 40.6% of those with the visa were from Brazil or Peru, but another 27.2% were from the Philippines (calculated from Japan Immigration Services Agency, 2021a). Despite being co-ethnics, these persons of Japanese descent (*nikkei*) are culturally dissimilar to Japanese and generally they and their children confront linguistic challenges, leading local communities to develop special programs for them and other nationalities.

The *Technical Intern Training Program (TITP)* enables workers to be employed for a maximum of five years (previously three years), provided they pass scheduled skill evaluations. The TITP is important for small and medium businesses and rural areas, with over half of technical interns working in manufacturing (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2021). In 2019, 27.7% of TITP workers were in the agriculture and food processing sectors (Organization for Technical Intern Training, 2020, p. 3). Vietnamese made up over half of the 402,356 TITP workers in 2020 and roughly half of all Vietnamese working in Japan. The next largest single nationality group in the TITP were Chinese, with 76,922 workers (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2021).

Despite its designation as a temporary skills-transfer program for workers from developing countries, the TITP has received international and domestic criticism because of inadequate rights protections and because, contrary to its official purpose, it functions as a system for low-paid labor migration. Employer abuses, inadequate monitoring of employers' conduct, and workers' flight resulted in a revamping of oversight practices in 2016. In late 2016, new legislation required employers to contract with "supervisory organizations" to ensure labor protections and social supports. Although these organizations strengthen protections, they

continue to reflect the interests of the employers who contract with and pay them. The system has remained directly under the Immigration Services Agency and separate from local public services.

Policy debate between 2016 and 2019 produced an employment permit system, the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) program, but the TITP was also retained. The SSW program, barely begun in 2019, is a formal work migration system for temporary employment. The visa can be obtained by either successfully completing a (three-year) term in the TITP or passing industry-specific skills and language tests. During the pandemic, the SSW program became one option for technical interns and students to change their expiring visas and legally work. The program allows workers to change employers, limits their dependence on one employer, and extends easier access to public supports for them.

International students account for 19% of foreign workers (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare 2021). Students are frequently visible members of the community while in Japan; after graduating, many will be eligible to obtain fulltime employment and remain in Japan. Students can obtain permission from the Immigration Services Agency (ISA) to work up to 28 hours per week. International students include students in Japanese language schools, vocational post-secondary schools, and colleges and universities. The majority (56%) work in hotels, restaurants, and retail or wholesale sectors. In practice, these students and their Japanese counterparts are filling similar jobs that are visible to and used by communities nationwide. By nationality, Vietnamese accounted for 41% of working international students and Chinese for 26% (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2021).

The Pandemic's Impact on Migrants

The onset of the pandemic in Japan produced border closings, uneven impacts on

economic sectors, school closings and remote schooling, and periodic emergency declarations. In March 2020, some prefectures began to ask residents to voluntarily restrict activities. In April, a one-month state of emergency entailing voluntary compliance began, initially for Tokyo and six prefectures, but later for the entire country. The emergency was extended to the end of May, but as conditions eased, it was suspended for many prefectures by mid-May.

The border closures disrupted the economy, affecting short-term business travel, Japanese production dependent on imported components, and international tourism, with major impacts on hospitality and retail sectors. In March, bans on entry for specific countries began and were expanded in April. These restrictions continued through summer 2020. By late summer, after negotiation with nearby neighbors, Japan began a phased-in easing of entry restrictions. By October, certain categories of holders of new visas for more than three months were allowed to enter (Osumi, 2020, Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021b, Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021a).

The pandemic affected employers and employees, including migrants concentrated in some of the most affected sectors. In 2020, employment in hotels and restaurants declined the most; daily services, entertainment, and manufacturing also lost jobs (Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training, 2021, p. 24). Between February and June 2020, Japan's losses in output were lower than in the United Kingdom, France, and Canada in the most hard-hit sectors except for manufacturing, for which it had the largest drop. Japan's share of employees in the most affected sectors, at about 16%, was in the middle for the fourteen economies reported by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020, p.12).

The government aimed to prevent Covid from spreading and to keep people working if at all possible, whether Japanese citizens or foreign residents. The government limited the duration

of greatest restrictions and subsidized companies to keep paying workers when the emergency caused them to close, but employers put the priority on retaining their permanent employees, putting part-time and temporary workers at a disadvantage. Income support payments were available to all, including registered foreign residents (those with visas for more than 3 months), including both a flat income support as well as special supports, such as for those caring for children. It was necessary to apply for these supports and the amount was only part of what one needed to live.

Foreign residents (excluding technical interns) could use national public employment offices, where foreigners' vulnerability became clear. Foreign-resident first-time job seekers due to involuntary job losses made up 57.1% of foreigners seeking work in April 2020 and rose to 68.6% in July. The corresponding figures for the general Japanese population were 35.2% and 33.9% respectively (JMHLW and MUFG Research and Consulting, 2022, pp. 19-20).

For international students and technical interns, the situation was complex, as both their employment and visa statuses were at risk. Because Japan's fiscal and academic years begin on April 1, many migrants were unable to enter Japan as anticipated, and others' visas were expiring or soon would expire. Newly contracted workers and new or returning students were unable to enter the country. Those whose visas were expiring were unable to leave. In some cases, the original employers could not afford to continue employing workers or had to furlough them indefinitely, especially workers with a temporary contract or part-time hourly-wage job. Many technical interns lost employment even if they had a valid visa, and international students lost income because of the severe limiting of hotel and restaurant services.

Methods

This article addresses how national regulations and their adjustment intersected with local governance to influence responses to foreign migrants' needs during the pandemic. In an emergency, local governments and civil society groups encounter foreign migrants with immediate needs that vary by location and group of migrants. Although pre-existing and emergency national regulations may define the legal position of migrants, local community relationships with migrants also should affect migrants' access to supports.

The previous discussion of multilevel governance, migrants' local membership, and emergency responsiveness provides the basis for two guiding questions. First, national control of migration policies suggests that national regulations, even if modified during the emergency, can influence but not determine how communities provide emergency supports to migrants. This leads to the question: How have these national regulations influenced the degree of connection a migrant group has to the community, not just in terms of public services, but daily activities that create local awareness of migrants as community members? Second, since labor market conditions are often local, how do those conditions influence local responses by providing alternatives for employment?

To qualitatively consider these questions, the study focuses on three major groups of migrants whose terms of entry and stay differ: technical interns, international students, and co-ethnics with long-term visas, primarily Brazilians and Peruvians. For the three groups, national migration regulations and emergency modifications imposed different terms of employment. In particular, unless regulations were adjusted, border closings directly affected technical interns and international students by preventing them from leaving and possibly working.

To assess national policies, the study draws on Japanese-language government documents and data, transcripts of advisory groups, and national news media coverage. In

addition, the study examines local responses reflected in regional newspaper coverage between April 1 and October 1, 2020, when border closures were in effect and the most severe impact was felt during the first year of the pandemic. Searches in a full-text news database spanned six Japanese-language newspapers from three regions in Japan (northeast, central, and western Japan). The major metropolitan areas in and surrounding Tokyo and Osaka were excluded in favor of less densely-populated regions. Newspapers were selected based on their circulation size and the geographic areas they serve, with three major and three smaller newspapers (Table I). Initial keyword searches using the broad terms for international student (*ryūgakusei*), technical training (*ginō jissū*), and “Brazilian or Peruvian” (*burajirujin OR perūjin*) yielded many results. Each of these articles was evaluated for relevance based on whether it addressed pandemic-related income and employment problems or national or local responses for the category searched; stories on extraneous topics were excluded. The content of articles was then analyzed further. Results enabled identifying general patterns of subnational actions. This was not a systematic survey of local governments but a way to grasp the range of local actors, types of response, and public attention.

Insert Table I about here

National and Local Responses

National supports for the general population were available to many foreign residents, but the Immigration Services Agency also made emergency adjustments in visas and employment eligibility conditions. Most registered foreign residents in the country for over three months also

were eligible for the lump-sum emergency payment given to Japanese citizens if they applied to the local government office.

Technicalities obstructed access to these funds for some. Foreign residents had to show they were registered residents as of April 27, 2020, requiring that they have a visa status with a normal length of longer than three months. However, the Immigration Services Agency's initial short-term emergency measures made doing this impossible. Those technical interns without job offers and international students whose visas were expiring could initially receive "temporary stay" extensions for 30 days and later 90 days, but they lost their original status. Although they could remain in Japan legally, the extensions excluded them from any lump-sum emergency benefits. The Immigration Services Agency's emergency measures were incrementally broadened, but these adaptations created administrative hurdles for migrants and those assisting them to learn the new conditions and produce the required paperwork. Technical interns seeking new employment through the supervisory organizations were especially disadvantaged given government restrictions (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

National changes outside of visa and work eligibility provisions included expanding staff and services for foreign residents at the nationally-provided local employment agency offices; and by late summer, the ISA had created a limited number of "help" offices and a national helpline for foreign residents. The latter services frequently played a triage role for steering the resident to other services that met their specific needs, but anecdotal evidence suggests they were not adequate.

Insert Table II about here

Co-ethnics with Long-term Visas

Co-ethnics with long-term visas, including Brazilians and Peruvians, generally had visa security, but their jobs and income security were at risk. Public employment offices throughout the country provide Japanese and foreign residents with job-matching assistance, but of the three groups examined here, those with long-term visas were the main users. During the pandemic, the government provided extra budget for translation services and advisors for foreign residents in 138 of the 544 employment offices (JMHLW and Ad hoc Council on Foreign Workers' Employment, 2021d). What proportion of foreign residents *needing* employment *used* these offices is unclear, but data indicated that in April, May, June, and July of 2020, the portion of long-term residents who were first-time job seekers after a job loss ranged between 66% and 76% (JMHLW and MUFG Research and Consulting, 2022).

Regional and local news media reveal two key points (Table II). Brazilians and Peruvians received significant attention from the media in central Japan, but virtually none in other regions. Because Latin Americans had clustered in central Japan, local governments and civil society groups had built an infrastructure of networks and supports. Data reported in Shizuoka Prefecture, which has a large long-term resident population, parallel the national data for public employment offices. In June 2020, 79% of foreign residents reported having lost income and 69% had lost a job or were furloughed, and by September, the results were only somewhat lower (Shizuoka-ken, 2020b, Shizuoka-ken, 2020a). Articles in Shizuoka Shimbun stressed dramatic

increases in lines at public employment offices and the inadequate interpretation staff (Shizuoka Shimbun, July 14, 2020). Local public offices, civil society, and businesses provided supports for Brazilians and Peruvians and other foreign residents. Food contributions, frequently distributed to families indirectly through local Brazilian schools, accompanied multilingual services and employment and income supports.

International Students

International students faced special hurdles, some that they shared with Japanese college and university students. Local supports were visible across the country, as national measures did little to help them. Those with expired visas could receive emergency extensions, but more generous changes in May to allow work applied only to those who had graduated earlier in the spring (Figure 1). Many international students with permission to work part-time often fell outside the reach of employment offices, were disadvantaged linguistically, and lacked familiarity with the social support system. Nationwide twenty-one offices provided support for international students to find regular employment, but testimony for an advisory council of experts in spring 2021 suggested that university information sources, social media groups, and the ethnic communities were likely far more successful in linking students with employment and information about food and other supports. In June 2020, 15% of new foreign job-seekers at public employment offices were international students or those authorized for special activities, compared to 68% who held status visas (JMHLW and Ad hoc Council on Foreign Workers' Employment, 2021e, JMHLW and Ad hoc Council on Foreign Workers' Employment, 2021b, JMHLW and Ad hoc Council on Foreign Workers' Employment, 2021c, JMHLW and MUFG Research and Consulting, 2022).

News coverage across localities was largely critical of special national measures that treated international students differently from Japanese students. In May 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announced a program for Japanese students who were living away from home and supporting themselves. Students could apply through their universities for a one-time grant of ¥100,000 (at the time, about US \$918). Those from low-income households could receive up to ¥200,000. Different rules applied to international students, however: they had to be in the top one-third of their class and have attended at least 80 percent of classes. MEXT justified the differential treatment as wanting to limit assistance only to those outstanding students likely to contribute to Japan in the future (Chūnichi shimbun, "Shingata korona kyūfu ryūgakusei wa jōi 3-wari nomi," May 21, 2020). Many news articles and advocacy, student, and lawyers' groups objected on the grounds this was discriminatory.

The reporting on the needs of international students was remarkably similar across regions, revealing much local assistance from public and private groups and dissatisfaction with MEXT's approach. Many universities and colleges announced their own cash support programs, some for all enrolled students including international students and some specifically for non-Japanese. Civil society groups, private businesses, and local governments provided in-kind and cash aid, especially food. A few articles reported programs to give students part-time work, and in central and western Japan some business-sponsored virtual recruitment sessions that included non-Japanese were held for internships and post-graduation employment.

Technical Interns

Technical interns encountered a different support system required by the Immigration Services Agency (ISA), and local supports were less obvious in news reports. Nationally-

registered supervisory organizations were supposed to counsel interns and help to find alternative employment, but regulations were complex and changed incrementally. Until August, interns were limited to the same organization unless work was found in one of the fourteen labor-short industries (Figure 1). Job changes had to be arranged through the supervisory organizations in coordination with the ISA.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Official data provided by supervisory organizations likely undercounted workers' problems, as these organizations were able to attribute problems to the individual worker rather than to the employer. Figure 2 illustrates the annual number of cases of “worker counseling” conducted in the worker’s native language. One can also expect that many issues were simply not recorded or lacked language assistance. The number of workers “in difficulty” reflects a more dramatic pattern of workers leaving their jobs, though the reasons were not necessarily reported and were often attributed to the worker. In contrast, anecdotal news articles covered cases of refuge given by a Buddhist temple, churches, and other support groups with ties to ethnic communities, but also of interns arrested for stealing food from fields.

These data do not reveal how many interns found other employment or obtained another visa status. One news article reported that as of the end of June 2020, 283 technical interns workers had received permission to change their employment—a very small number out of the total in Japan at the time (Tōō nippō, August 18, 2020). However, the government allowed the Specified Skilled Worker program to become an option for qualified TITP participants and international students unable to leave Japan to find legal employment in labor-short sectors. As

of March 2021, the ISA reported a total of 22,567 persons holding an SSW visa, with 89% of them having transferred from the TITP, but the context of their transfer is not available, including whether they transferred because of having completed three years in the TITP (Japan Immigration Services Agency, 2021b).

National policies for technical interns had mixed applicability depending on the industry and the regional labor market, but outside of work they remained isolated from the community. Indeed, although general local supports for foreign residents also targeted technical trainees, employers suffering from a lack of workers in agriculture gained more attention. The inflexibility of the TITP was visible in that efforts to find scarce agricultural workers did not widely involve trying to move TITP workers from sectors in trouble, but to locate Japanese workers.

In the more industrial and mixed economies of central Japan, agriculture, manufacturing, and services co-existed. Several apparel factories shifted production to masks and protective clothing, thereby continuing operations and interns' employment (Chūnichi shimbun, "Kishi kaisei masuku ni itoguchi," 2020). A few articles indicated that employers were able to keep paying technical interns despite stopping operations by using the government's short-term assistance to employers for interrupted production (*kyūgyō*). Local emergency public and private supports for interns also emerged but were not as striking as those for international students.

Migrants as Local Members

The above accounts reveal that local governance varied not just by the characteristics of the migrants, but that community responses at times had to work around or in spite of national supports or their lack. The accounts support the first expectation that national regulations can influence migrants' access to supports as members of the local community. Brazilians and Peruvians on status visas and international students had relationships with the community,

worked as community members, and used public services. Community responses drew on prior community awareness and institutional resources for including migrants, but they also reflected awareness of migrants' local community membership and needs.

Recognition of migrants' membership in communities in the middle of distress emerged. For international students, the insistence by Japanese on the equality of international students for income supports throughout the country was consistent with long-held principles concerning foreign residents' equal access to social benefits and with their equal treatment in receiving emergency payments for the general population. But the attention to students and the outpouring of supports from community organizations also suggests a perception of these students as "deserving" community members. Their employers were often forced to shut down or restrict operations, but with the expectation of reopening. Even if there were few examples of creating or finding part-time work for them, employers in some communities were holding recruitment meetings to try to attract new and prospective graduates, anticipating life beyond the emergency. Students were in Japan to pursue studies and were often from less affluent countries, putting them in a position somewhat analogous to that of Japanese students who were also vulnerable in terms of income. International students were not necessarily short-term residents, as legal options existed for many to remain after graduation to contribute to society and the economy. Some employers were eager to secure them for the longer term.

Communities with many Brazilians and Peruvians and other nationalities with long-term visas had recognized these migrants as local members for decades and developed their own institutions to support inclusion; national public employment offices had also become a necessary resource. Because these migrants were not subject to limits on working, the public employment offices were a ready support, although even with extra budget they proved to be

inadequate in a crisis. This experience was not new, because many of the same communities had contended with similar unemployment problems during the global economic crisis of 2008-2009.

TITP workers were in a different position, as national immigration regulations had largely sequestered them from the local communities. The separate support system of supervisory organizations proved to be inadequate and had shallow experience due to its recent formation; it certainly was not prepared to meet sudden large-scale unemployment challenges. The complex specifications as to what types of work TITP workers could have in the emergency prevented migrants from legally taking on part-time work or easily moving to another job without working through supervisory organizations and remaining in the same occupation and sector. Although some communities and voluntary groups created supports such as providing food and shelter, assisting with needed paperwork to apply for a visa, and in rare cases helping to locate employment, the national regulatory system had to be used.

Local labor market conditions mattered for these groups, but in different ways. The impacts on technical interns and their employers varied by the local labor market and industry. Some technical interns were able to move to labor-short occupations, but doing that depended on supervisory organizations' support. It is further unclear whether very many of these workers were able to move to another region. Instead, assistance appears to have depended on the ability of employers to shift production or to obtain national emergency benefits to continue to pay interns while operations were shut down. Newspaper coverage of responses to interns compared to international students in Table II suggests much more local awareness and sympathy for international students, whose employment situation appears to have been comparable across regions.

The coverage of Brazilians and Peruvians differed from that of the other two groups of migrants in that national policies—except for public employment offices—were barely mentioned. They had been clustered in central Japan for decades, providing needed labor. But the coverage indirectly highlights a different challenge: the segmentation of Latin Americans into less secure employment in the labor market as contract workers rather than regular employees. This group’s experience reveals long-term structural vulnerabilities associated with the co-ethnic-based migration policy.

Although local labor market conditions varied, ways of contending with them varied by migrants’ ties to the local community. Communities with Brazilians and Peruvians and other co-ethnics had already recognized them as members and built up an infrastructure of supports for them; international students, even though recent to Japan and ostensibly very temporary residents, received equal treatment in the community and as possible future skilled and professional employees. In contrast, TITP workers were relatively segregated from local community and dependent on the vertical structure of regulations and supports organized by the national ministry.

Conclusion

Emergency conditions are by nature difficult. One’s position in a community can matter for whether they have access to basic needs or, in the direst circumstances, can survive. If a migration system allows migrants to be recognized and included in the local community, it gives at least a marginal promise of collective assistance in a crisis. But if a national migration system segregates particular groups of workers from the local community through its system of rules, it also potentially deprives that group of necessary supports in an emergency. This study indicates

that national rules affect how local communities may respond to migrant needs in an emergency, but those rules do not fully determine their responses.

Together these migrants' experiences reveal that local governance and community stepped in when national government support was insufficient. For international students, this meant recognizing them as members deserving of support, even when national rules did not treat them as equally deserving. They also reveal that national policies that have imposed explicit exclusion from general public services have disadvantaged migrants in urgent conditions by limiting access to community in formal and informal ways.

National policies in a multilevel system mattered, as Jon Pierre has suggested, by setting systematic rules even under emergency conditions. But these rules were inadequate for meeting the *immediate* needs of migrants. Local responses were diverse, with prior experience, networks, and migrants' membership enabling the response in some cases. Local actors—sometimes cooperating and sometimes working independently—played a critical role in meeting those needs and thereby demonstrated *flexibility* that national rules did not. But to be effective, that flexibility required there be a tie between communities and migrants.

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Table I. Newspapers Searched with Key Descriptive Data

	Newspaper	Print Circulation	Prefectures in Delivery Area	Foreign Resident Population in Delivery Prefectures, 12/2019			
				Total Foreign Residents	Subtotal of Brazilians & Peruvians	Subtotal of International Students	Subtotal of Technical Interns
Western Japan	Nishinippon Shimbun (Western Japan News)	514,104	Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Kagoshima, Miyazaki, Nagasaki, Oita, Saga	153,918	1044	31,243	44,997
	Shikoku Shimbun (Shikoku News)	200,000	Kagawa Prefecture	14,266	587	756	6,732
Central Japan	Chūnichi Shimbun (Central Japan News)	2,136,296	Aichi, Fukui, Gifu, Ishikawa, Mie, Nagano, Shiga, Shizuoka, Toyama	623,026	162,266	32,888	118,929
	Shizuoka Shimbun	624,000	Shizuoka	100,148	36,108	4,196	15,943
Northern Japan	Hokkaido Shimbun (Hokkaido News)	874,338	Hokkaido	42,485	255	4,952	13,422
	Kahoku Shimpō (Kahoku News)	410,000	Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi, Yamagata	66,513	822	8,486	6,732

Notes: Data on print circulation are from the Factiva database and based on daily (M-F) delivery. Data on foreign population and foreign population groups was taken from Japan's statistical service (e-stat) database for foreign residents residing in Japan as of 12/2019. Data on technical interns includes those working in both individual trainee relationships and employer-group sponsorship relationships.

Table II. Summary Results of Articles, by Migrant Group, Newspaper, and Selected Themes¹

Newspaper		Relevant Results (Total Results)				
Brazilians and Peruvians			Jobs or Income	National Supports & Rules	Local ² Supports	Children's Schools
Western	Nishi-Nippon Shimbun	0 (5)	-	-	-	-
	Shikoku Shimbun	0 (2)	-	-	-	-
Central	Chūnichi Shimbun	33(98)	10	2	32	7
	Shizuoka Shimbun	10 (32)	5	3	8	-
North	Hokkaido Shimbun	0 (5)	-	-	-	-
	Kahoku Shimpō	0 (3)	-	-	-	-
International Students			National Supports or Rules	Local Supports (total)	Contributions from schools	Food Contributions
Western	Nishi-Nippon Shimbun	17 (118)	12	38	5	11
	Shikoku Shimbun	18 (54)	9	4	1	1
Central	Chūnichi Shimbun	58 (174)	12	45	6	13
	Shizuoka Shimbun	17 (99)	5	12	1	1
North	Hokkaido Shimbun	19 (99)	4	10	3	0
	Kahoku Shimpō	20 (47)	0	20	1	7
Technical Interns			Employment	Labor Shortage	National Supports or Rules	Local Supports
Western	Nishi-Nippon Shimbun	17 (43)	11	8	1	3
	Shikoku Shimbun	5(16)	1	2	2	1
Central	Chūnichi Shimbun	39 (129)	6	18	5	17
	Shizuoka Shimbun	16 (43)	5	2	4	7
North	Hokkaido Shimbun	46 (153)	9	25	4	17
	Kahoku Shimpō	6 (15)	1	4	0	4

Notes:

¹Themes will add up to more than the total of articles analyzed because some addressed more than one theme. For International Students, contributions from schools and food contributions are also included in total local supports.

²Local supports include those from public and private entities.

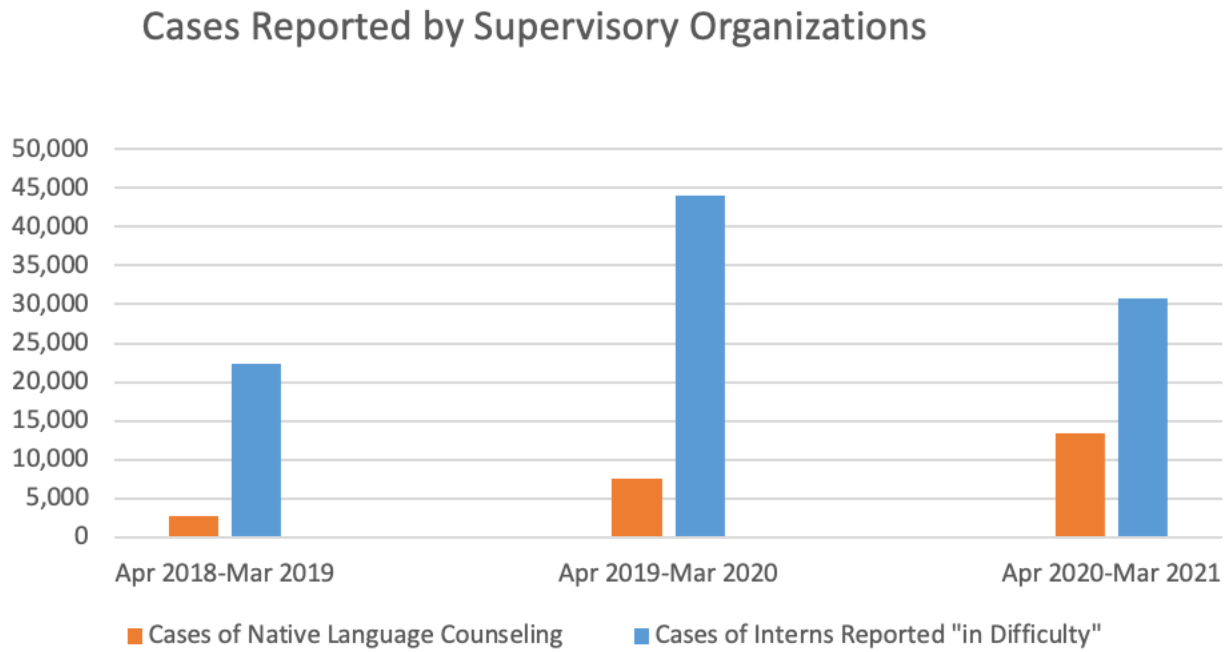
Figure 1. Sequence of Ad hoc Migration Policy Changes

Target Group	Changes Made	Approach as of March 2021
International students unable to return home	-2.28.20: temporary stay of 30 days -4.3.20: temporary stay of 90 days -*5.21.20: stay for “specified activities” of 6 months; can work up to 28 hrs. per week; *for those who graduated in 2020	10.19.20: “specified activities” for 6 months; eligibility to work for up to 28 hrs. a week; for those who had an international student visa regardless of whether or when they graduate
TITP workers unable to return home, who have a job offer that meets requirements	2.28.20: “specified activities” for 30 days, for interns whose work term is finished; to work in same occupation and organization; 4.3: “specified activities” of 3 months; to work in same occupation and organization; 4.27: “specified activities” for 3 months: for interns whose work term is finished; to work in same occupation but possibly under a different organization; 5.21: “specified activities” for 6 months; for interns whose work term is finished; to work in same occupation but possibly under a different organization.	8.12.20: “specified activities” for 6 months; for interns whose work term is finished; to work in a related occupation and under the same or different organization;
For those affected by Covid pandemic: -TITP workers who lost their jobs -TITP workers who cannot return home -Credentialed workers who lost their jobs -International student graduates with promised but retracted job offers and offers of other work meeting requirements	4.20.20: “specified activities” of up to one year with work eligibility; to work in one of the 14 designated sectors of high demand	9.7.20: “specified activities” of up to one year; for TITP workers who lost jobs or who have ended their training and cannot return home; to work in one of 14 designated sectors
TITP workers without job offers	2.28.20: temporary stay of 30 days 4.3 temporary stay of 90 days 5.21.20: “specified activities” for 6 months but without eligibility to work	12.1.20: “specified activities” for six months but no work eligibility; if meet conditions can work up to 28 hours part-time with special permission
Those on short temporary stay visas (e.g. tourist)	2.28.20: temporary stay of 30 days 4.3.20: temporary stay of 90 days	12.1.20: temporary stay of 90 days; those who meet conditions can work up to 28 hours per week with special permission

Source: (Japan Ministry of Health and Ad hoc Council on Foreign Workers’ Employment, 2021c).

Note: This is an English adaptation of a chart prepared by the Immigration Services Agency (ISA) for the Ad hoc Council on Foreign Labor.

Figure 2. Interns' Problems Reported by Supervisory Organizations, 2018-2021



Source: Organization for Technical Intern Training, Annual Administrative Data, https://www.otit.go.jp/research_toukei/.

Note: Figure constructed by the author based on data derived from multiple annual data summaries.