Special Measures and Activities Related to Employment and Workplace Taken by Japanese Constituents In Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake

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ILO Office for Japan

- More than 3 weeks have passed since the East-Japan earthquake and tsunami, measures taken by government are moving into the stage of recovery and reconstruction from the stage of immediate relief.
- Not only Government but also social partners established their headquarters for response to this disaster.
- Measures related to labour taken by Government mainly focused on urgent aids for workers like urgent treatment of Employment Insurance and Employment Adjustment Subsidy Programme (EASP) at the first stage.
- On 5 April, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) announced a new package of measures for urgent employment creation and so on targeting on reconstruction as second stage of measures.

[Outline of damage and suffering due to the earthquake and related accident]

(Damage and suffering due to the earthquake)
Around 14:46 of March 11, massive earthquakes with the magnitude of 9.0 struck Sanriku Coast, Japan. Waves of tsunami swept cities and villages of Tohoku district off the Pacific Ocean, causing devastating human as well as physical damages. Tokyo also observed tremors with a seismic intensity of 5-strong, but damage there was relatively modest. Aftershocks still persist, particularly in Tohoku district.

This earthquake and tsunami devastated Tohoku district and other regions. Damages were inflicted in East Kanto district, too. The number of deaths is 12,468, the number of injured is 2,885, and the number of missing is 15,091 (as of April 6 at 10:00 according to the National Police Agency). The number of those evacuated is approximately 195,121 (as of April 5 at 11:00 according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency).

Sympathies have been expressed and assistance offered from around the world. So far 134 countries and regions as well as 39 international organizations have expressed their intentions to extend assistance. Rescue teams from 18 countries and regions as well as a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team and an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team of experts have been in operation in Japan. Also, the U.S. Forces in Japan are extending assistance.

(Accident on Fukushima nuclear power plant)
The earthquake and tsunami resulted in emergency situations including failure of the reactor-cooling systems in TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company)'s nuclear power stations in Fukushima Prefecture. The situation is still unstable (leakage of radioactive contaminated water and so on) and it is difficult to predict when the power plant finally cool down and become safe at this stage.
Due to this situation, the area around the plant was assigned as evacuation area for the area of 20km from the plant and as voluntary evacuation or staying in the house area for the area of 30km from the plant.

(Getting ordinary life back in non disaster-stricken areas)

However, non disaster-stricken areas including Tokyo become calm and took the ordinary life back. And scheduled power stoppage due to shortage of electric power was not conducted in these several days because the climate becomes warm.

(Number of establishments and workers in the affected region)

It is very difficult to calculate the exact number of affected workers and employers in this stage. However, MHLW estimates the number of establishments and workers in the coastal communes in 3 prefectures (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima), it says 88 thousands establishments and 841 thousands workers.

[Government]

( Establishment of Conference on support for disaster victims' employment promotion and creation )

Just after the earthquake, Japanese government established the “Headquarters for Emergency Disaster Measures” headed by P.M. Mr. KAN and related ministries also established their own headquarters for response to the disaster. On 20 March, “Subsidiary Headquarters for Special Measures to Assist the Lives of Disaster Victims” headed by Mr. MATSUMOTO, Minister of State for Disaster Management. was established under the “Headquarters for Emergency Disaster Measures”

“Conference on support for disaster victims' employment promotion and creation” was established under the chairmanship of Ms. KOMIYAMA, Senior Vice Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, and held the first meeting on 28 March. This conference is subordinate body of the “Subsidiary Headquarters for Special Measures to Assist the Lives of Disaster Victims”. The secretariat of this conference was headed by both Mr. KOBAYASHI, Parliamentary Secretary of Health, Labour and Welfare, and Mr. TSUGAWA, Parliamentary Secretariat of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. The members of this conference consists of Director-Generals of related bureaus in MHLW, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Ministry of Environment.

(Current situation on public service on labour)

Due to this disaster, 11 Public Employment Security Offices (PESOs, 545 in Japan) and 7 Labour Standard Inspection Offices (LSIOs, 325 in Japan) were obliged to close as of 14 March. However, those offices gradually became open and all PESOs and LSIOs are open on 28 March except three offices (1 LSIO and 2 PESOs) situated in the area of evacuation or staying in the house (30 km area from Fukushima nuclear power plant) due to Fukushima nuclear power plant problem which are obliged to be closed since 14 March.

(Urgent measures for suffered people, workers and employers)

[Date indicated is the day when MHLW requested or ordered to subordinate organs]
1. **Measures on Employment Insurance**
   - Payment of unemployment benefit to workers who are not unemployed but cannot receive wage because of suspension (shutdown) of company's activity (special treatment) (12, 13 March)
   - Giving flexibility of procedure for unemployment benefit payment (for beneficiaries since before the earthquake) (11 March)

2. **Measures on job placement**
   - Setting up a special consultation desk on employment for suffered people (workers) in PESOs (12 March) and for refugees in places of refuge (25 March)
   - Job placement by PESOs across wider area using national network, special payment of trip expense on interviews for a job and moving after getting job (24 March)
   - Securing job offers with residence from the whole country (25 March)
   - Holding large job placement fairs in order to match up job offers by employers who have intention to hire jobseekers suffered by the disaster to such jobseeker suffered by the disaster (25 March)

3. **Measures concerning Employment Adjustment Subsidy Programme (EASP)**
   - Easing conditions of EASP for employers in the suffered area (17 March)
   - Giving further flexibility on procedure for EASP (30 March)

4. **Measures for new graduates (a person who has just graduated or will graduate next spring)**
   - Special treatment of EASP for new employees (new graduates) who are obliged to be absent from work because of shutdown of business, closing establishment, scale down operations due to the earthquake, escape from the area of Fukushima nuclear power plant or scheduled power stoppage by shortage of electricity (13 March)
   - Request employers' organizations (328 organizations) to allow new graduates (with unofficially promised job offer) to enter enterprises, to give special consideration for young jobseekers from suffered areas by the disaster and to consider new graduates who were cancelled unofficially promised job offer (22 March)

5. **Measures on housing for affected people**
   - Fully utilizing of "Employment Promotion Apartment" as temporary apartments for refugees due to the disaster (12 March) (including refugees from Fukushima nuclear power plant area – 19 March) and extending the duration for refugees to lend it up to 2 years (29 March)

6. **Measures on labour conditions and occupational safety and health**
   - Setting up an urgent consultation desk on labour conditions, OSH, Labour Insurance and workers’ accident compensation in LSIOs (25 March)
   - Offering dust masks (up to 90,000) to suffered area through prefectural labour bureau (28 March, 4 April)
   - Telephone consultation on health (including mental health) for suffered people by Industry Health Support Center and regional Industry Health Center and so on (16 March)

7. **Measures on Worker’s Compensation Insurance**
   - Giving flexibility on procedure of applications for benefit of Worker’s Compensation Insurance (11 March)
   - Raising public awareness of procedure of Worker’s Compensation Insurance with newly compiled Q&A for victims by the Earthquake and Tsunami (24 March)
(New package of measures announced on 5 April)

On 5 March, MHLW announced new package of measures for the affected people by the disaster, which was compiled by “Conference on support for disaster victims’ employment promotion and creation”. This package is called “Phase 1”, which means the Conference will announce other package one after another coping with the situation at that time. This package consists of three pillars, (1) Creation of employment by restoration undertaking, (2) Construction of system for matching between affected jobseekers and jobs, (3) Preserving employment of the affected workers.

(1) Creation of employment by restoration undertaking (Cash for Work for restoration undertaking)
- Add “Activities response to the disaster” to the target growing sectors of the “Employment Creation Programme on target sector”
- Extending of the duration (currently 1 year) of the “Employment Creation Programme on target sector”
- Securing the priority of employment to affected people using PESO’s network and giving a special subsidy to employers who hire an unemployed due to the disaster

(2) Construction of system for matching between affected jobseekers and jobs (“United Japan (Nihon wa hitotsu)” project by PESOs)
- Establishment of “Work Council” consisted of national government’s organs, local governments and related organizations in order to gather information on reconstruction projects, to secure preferential usage of materials to reconstruction activities and to submit job offerings to PESOs
- Strengthening and expansion of the function of PESOs like (1) establishment of the network to outside related bodies, (2) delivering job placement services to places of refuge, (3) establishment of new public vocational training course for suffered people (workers) and (4) sending PESO’s stuff in non affected areas to PESOs in affected areas where consultations, operations and duties are considerably increased

(3) Preserving employment of the affected workers
- Expansion of EASP (coverage for special treatment, new measures for affected employer by scheduled power stoppage)

[Workers]

(Establishment of Headquarters of Disaster Relief and Measures by RENGO)

On 14 March, Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) established “Headquarters of Disaster Relief and Measures” headed by Mr. KOGA, President of RENGO. This headquarters immediately decided to start a fund-raising campaign for the disaster relief. And it also started dispatching volunteers to affected regions from 31 March and they intend to send a total 25,000 volunteers by the end of June.

(Request to Government and political parties)

On 15 and 16 March, RENGO requested the Government (P.M. Mr. KAN etc.) and political parties to take urgent measures for the disaster. The outline of requests are (1) Securing lifeline for the suffered people, (2) Urgent employment and labour measures, (3) Securement of safety for vulnerable workers.

(Request to temporary staffing (dispatched workers) agencies and companies where dispatched
workers are assigned)

On 18 March, RENGO requested Japan Staffing Services Association (President Mr. SAKAMOTO) and Japan Production Labour Skill Association (President Mr. SHIMIZU) to take urgent measures for job security and working conditions of dispatched workers concerning East-Japan Earthquake and the following scheduled power stoppage.

(Request to MHLW)

On 25 March, at MHLW, RENGO requested Mr. HOSOKAWA, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, and Mr. KOBAYASHI, Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Labour and Welfare to take urgent measures for the disaster.

(Request to Small and Medium Enterprise Agency)

29 March, at Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, RENGO requested Mr. TAKAHARA, Director-General of Small and Medium Enterprise Agency, to take urgent measures for the disaster.

(Suspension of an annual spring wage offensive)

March is the most important and final stage of an annual wage offensive (Shunto). However, bargaining of this annual spring offensive in several companies like Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), East Japan Railway Company (JR-Higashi Nihon), Japan Freight Railway Company (JR-Kamotsu), Japan Post Group (JP) and several private railways companies was suspended due to the disaster and has not finished yet.

[Employers]

( Establishment of Headquarters for Response to Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake)

On 14 March, Japan Business Federation (JBF) established “Headquarter for Response to Tohoku-Pacific Ocean Earthquake” and is working on supporting affected people and reconstruction. General manager of the Headquarters is Mr. YONEKURA (President of JBF) and deputy general manager is Mr. NAKAMURA (Secretary-general of JBF). The headquarters gives priority to “Supporting affected people” and “Reconstruction”. The headquarters will request member companies/organizations cooperation and cooperate and coordinate with Government, NPO and NGO etc. For the time being, the headquarters will focus on “Supporting suffered people”. They will work on cooperating with the related organs including with “Disaster Volunteer Supporting Project Conference” collecting on-the-spot information with request to member companies/organizations to donate and to provide machinery and materials, relief goods and services necessary.

(Consideration for 2012 student jobseekers)

On 15 March, JBF requested member companies to make the best efforts for 2012 student jobseekers like extending a dead line of application document (entry sheet etc.).

On 22nd March, JBF requested member companies to make much more efforts for 2012 student jobseekers from suffered areas to reconsider whole employment procedures including extending a date of employment procedures, establishment of exceptional chance of employment, securement of more chances of employment, extending dead line of an entry sheet submission, and rescheduling of employment process.
On 31 March, JBF announced “Urgent appeal for reconstruction from the damage by the earthquake”. This appeal covers broad range and it goes without saying that it includes issues related labour and employment.

i  “Employment Creation Programme on target sector” identified nursing care, medical service, agriculture and fisheries, environment, energy, tourism and education and studies as growing sectors. Local governments can entrust some activities of growing sector to enterprises or NGOs with new employment using the fund funded by the national government under this programme (for 1 year).

ii The outline of requests is as follows;
[To dispatching agencies and company where dispatched workers are assigned]
1. In case that a client can’t operate, making an effort to secure an alternative employment opportunity for dispatched workers cooperating with the client. In case that they can’t find it, supporting dispatched workers by providing an allowance for absence from work etc.
2. Not to cancel the contract before maturity. Under unavoidable circumstances, securing wage for unexpired term.
3. Treating their absence, lateness and leave early caused by a disruption in public transportation schedule as a normal attendance.
4. Paying the difference for unavoidable detour commuting.
5. Making the best effort to secure their jobs and to keep working conditions.
[To trade unions under RENGO]
1. Requesting companies to minimize the effect like a suspension of dispatched workers’ work and not to request the dispatching agencies to cut fees.
2. Requesting companies not to cancel and to avoid disadvantage treatment for reasons of their absence lateness and leave early affected by the disaster.
3. Requesting companies to make the best effort to avoid a dismissal for reasons of the disaster and following scheduled power stoppage.
4. In the case of unavoidable suspension or dismissal, requesting companies to make an effort to secure an alternative employment opportunity for them cooperating with the client. In case that they can’t it, requesting the dispatching agencies to pay adequate compensation as well as providing an allowance for absence from work and a compensation of damages more than a dismissal allowance.

iii The major requests are as follows;
1. One-stop service for (1) consultation for procedures of job hunting support, unemployment insurance and workers’ accident compensation insurance, (2) labour consultation (wage, dismissal) and (3) mental health consultation
2. Strengthen OSH (rapid payment for affected workers, asbestos, workers in nuclear power plant and so on)
3. Raising public awareness of exceptional measures for unemployment insurance and consideration to review necessary
4. Raising public awareness of exceptional measures for employment adjustment subsidy, further expansion of subsidy and easing necessary conditions
5. Support for strategic building industries which create employment in the region for reconstruction.
6. Early enactment of a bill “Act on Support for Jobseekers who cannot receive unemployment benefit” (second
safety-net) and establishment of public base for vocational training in the affected regions.

The major requests are as follows:
1. Expansion of financial measures for SMEs
2. Measures for enterprise turnaround initiative
3. Support for SME workers (one-stop consultation services, employment security for new graduates and so on)

Issues related to labour and employment are as follows:
- Implementation of new project on employment creation in the suffered areas
- Support to the companies who are making efforts to maintain their employment
- Securing the life of unemployed and support for their reemployment
- Offering job opportunities with support to the companies who intend to hire works and introduction of suffered unemployed to public works projects
- Consideration for procedure and premises of labour insurance