

# Japan: Social crisis for the survivors of the March 11 disaster

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## **As unemployment insurance dries up, quake victims struggle to find jobs**

Only about 20 percent of survivors of the March 11 disaster seeking work through public job-placement offices in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures found employment by the end of July, labor ministry sources said.

A total of 63,352 people have registered with job-placement offices in the three prefectures as “victim job-seekers” from March to July. Only 13,017 of them, or 20.5 percent, landed jobs through the office’s services as of the end of July.

The labor ministry suspects the number of victim job-seekers is probably larger, given that registration records may not have recorded all job-seekers in the areas amid the chaos after the March 11 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami.

However, the 13,017 figure does not include those who have returned to work after their companies resumed operations or those who found jobs on their own. Although this indicates that more than 20.5 percent of victim job-seekers are employed in the region, it is clear that more than half of them have not been able to find work.

No nationwide statistics are available that pin down the proportion of people who found employment through job-placement offices. But the national average can be estimated at around 30 percent by comparing the numbers of job-seekers and those who found jobs during the March-July period. The 20.5 percent figure for the disaster-hit prefectures is far below that rate.

There was at least one new job per applicant in July in all three prefectures, with the ratios for Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures exceeding the national average, driven by rising demand for rebuilding work.

But many of those jobs or the work conditions were undesirable for the job-seekers, inhibiting a rise in employment rates in the areas.

The situation is expected to worsen for those not working, as the number of jobless people without unemployment insurance could increase by several thousand each month from October.

Some 60,221 people who had enrolled in unemployment insurance programs through their employers before losing their jobs qualified for insurance payments for the initial payment term from April to July in the three prefectures. Among them, 29.7 percent, or 17,911-the largest group of recipients-had to take the shortest payment term of 90 days.

The 90-day period requires claimants to be either younger than 45 years old and have paid premiums for less than five years, or be 45 or older and have paid premiums for less than one year.

However, recipients can extend the 90-day period to 210 days if they have lost jobs or were forced to

suspend business operations in the aftermath of the March 11 temblor.

Yet, some recipients' payment periods will expire as early as mid-October.

Furthermore, 180-day terms, used by 21.1 percent of all recipients, will expire starting in January, although they can extend the period to 300 days.

The central government is looking to improve employment rates in quake-hit areas by expanding spending for restructuring projects in the third supplementary budget. The government also plans to further finance job-creation programs run by prefectural governments, with the intention of providing temporary jobs for the unemployed.

**Asahi Shimbun** , September 7, 2011

<http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201109060435.html>

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### **Iwate becomes 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 hard-hit prefectures to close all shelters**

YAMADA (Kyodo) — The four remaining shelters in Iwate Prefecture were closed Wednesday, making it the first of the three prefectures hardest hit by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami to end operation of all public shelters.

As of Tuesday afternoon, 17 people were staying at the shelters, all located in the town of Yamada. At the peak on March 13, 54,429 evacuees took shelter in Iwate, with a maximum of 399 shelters open on March 19 after the disaster that devastated northeastern Japan.

The biggest shelter in Fukushima Prefecture, where as many as 2,500 people had stayed, was also shut down Wednesday, while around 550 people remain in the prefecture's 17 other facilities. In Miyagi Prefecture, 3,930 people remained in 143 shelters as of Tuesday, the local government said.

Many of the evacuees in Iwate have moved into temporary housing — 12,683 makeshift apartments and 3,856 private housing units rented by the prefectural government in Iwate as of last Thursday.

Fukushima Prefecture initially planned to end operation of most of its shelters by the end of August, but it will be put off as some evacuees are still staying there, the local government said.

As 13,478 temporary housing units had been completed as of Wednesday and enough privately run housing is expected to be secured in the prefecture, Fukushima plans to shut down all of its public shelters by the end of October.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/31/20110831p2g00m0dm093000c.html>

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**60% of survey respondents say gov't info on disasters least reliable**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Nearly 60 percent of respondents to a survey about the credibility of information issued after a disaster said the government and ministries are the least reliable information source, the university professor who conducted the survey said Friday.

The survey was conducted in June by the research office of Hirotada Hirose, an honorary professor of psychology at Tokyo Woman's Christian University, targeting 1,200 people nationwide aged 15 to 79 years old.

The actual figure of 59.2 percent represents a jump from 22.7 percent of respondents in a similar survey last year by the university, indicating public distrust of information provided by the government has risen sharply in the wake of the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant following the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

"With necessary information (about the nuclear crisis) having come out late, citizens acutely sensed the faithlessness of (the state's) public relations," Hirose said.

The survey found 15.5 percent of respondents cited broadcasters' own programs as the least reliable source of information, while 7.5 percent said private research agencies and think tanks were the least reliable.

As for the most reliable source of disaster information, 21.3 percent cited prefectures and municipalities, 18.8 percent selected original TV programs, and 17.4 percent said experts at universities and research institutions.

Some 10.6 percent chose the government and municipalities as the most reliable information source.

Regarding radiation exposure, 45.1 percent said they are extremely concerned and 35.8 percent said they are quite concerned.

Yet when it comes to buying food, 35.4 percent said they do not, or try not to buy foods whose safety is in doubt. Two-thirds of respondents, or 64.5 percent, said they do not care much or at all.

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<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/national/archive/news/2011/08/27/20110827p2g00m0dm009000c.html>

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