

Women hit harder in job market than men in disaster areas

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TOKYO (Kyodo) — Women faced greater difficulty in finding jobs than men in the northeastern Japan area hardest hit by the March 11 disasters, a labor ministry survey on jobless benefit recipients showed.

In November, there were roughly 40 percent more female recipients, at 37,601, than male ones, at 26,631, compared with almost equal numbers for both sexes in the pre-disaster period, according to the data.

The data released late last year by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare concerned Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, the three prefectures hardest hit by the magnitude 9.0 earthquake just off the coast of the region and subsequent massive tsunami.

Job offers have been on the rise in the region but many of them are in the construction or civil engineering markets to meet reconstruction demand — a type of work deemed more suitable for men.

Another factor behind women's hardships appears to stem from the slow recovery of the fishing industry in the area, which employed many women before the disasters.

The labor ministry released the data on a breakdown by sex of jobless benefit recipients and other job data at the request of a women's rights group. In February, before the disasters, recipients comprised 14,500 men and 15,000 women.

After the disasters, female recipients surged, totaling around 45,000, exceeding men by a margin of over 10,000 in the peak month of June.

Subsequent employment aid measures and reconstruction work helped curb joblessness but female recipients continued to outnumber men by around 10,000.

Female job seekers also far outpaced men in November at 74,000 women against 62,500 men.

The central government has come up with measures to help civic groups and private businesses hire more women and disabled people in the disaster areas.

But a group supporting women in those areas said non-profit organizations run chiefly by women are at a disadvantage in bidding on projects that may promise jobs as they lack expertise in obtaining tender offer information and producing project plans.

Jobless benefits are provided to those who have joined employment insurance for designated periods and lost their jobs. Depending on age and reasons for leaving jobs, they are eligible for benefits for between 90 and 330 days in principle.

The government extended the period by up to 120 days for workers in the disaster-hit areas and

another 90 days for some coastal regions devastated even more badly.

P.S.

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