Migrant Workers’s Employment and Their Working Conditions in the Post-disaster Recovery Period: Case Study of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake

by Ruttiya Bhula, Yukio Ikemoto, PhD
University of Tokyo
Ruttiya.bhulaor@gmail.com, ikemoto@ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract. The 2011 great east Japan earthquake in Tohoku area caused more than 15,883 deaths. It widely affected on a number of groups including migrants. This study aims to investigate the impact of natural disasters on migrant workers who are vulnerable to such situations, and their working conditions based on primary data and in-depth analysis. The study also employed a developed analytical framework using a difference-in-differences analysis to probe in a qualitative approach. The study suggested that the lack of preparedness for natural disasters, limited accessibilities to up-to-date information in their languages as well as uncertainties to forecast their future employment status were crucial to their work and future expectation in the post-disaster recovery period. Though a number of organizations provided multi-language media, including radio and internet-based information, apparently the accessible rate to migrants was limited. From this study, all respondents confirmed that the impact on their work and employment cannot be measured by the employment rate alone. The deepening impact had grown its roots to low-income migrants, which did not reflect by statistics. Their wages and overtime hours were reduced resulting in a decrease in their total income until these days. In addition, the majority of people interviewed were covered by social insurance, but they were reluctant to pursue claims because of the absence of knowledge of social insurance, as well as complicated paper work. The government project for victims’ employment and livelihood benefited only some migrants indirectly, through financial support of small and medium businesses due to limited inaccessibility to the assistances. Therefore, migrant workers should be one of target groups for labour-related policies at the country of destination. Government policies and measurements may provide alternative assistance schemes which are harmonized to the migrants’ working characteristics and working status in particular, through existing informal channels in order to ensure sustainable recovery and better reintegration constructed on human rights’ principles.

Key words: Employment policies, Migrant workers, Natural disasters, J15, J69, Q54

1 Introduction

On March 11, 2011, a Japanese earthquake caused tremendous devastation locally. The National Police Agency of Japan reports that as of June 9, 2013, there were 15,883 deaths and 2,656 people missing (National Police Agency of Japan, 2012). This is the fourth largest earthquake in the world and the largest in Japan since instrumental recordings began in the 1900s. The disaster wounded all groups of people, especially vulnerable people, including migrant workers. Previous studies suggest that women, young workers and those with low skills and those in irregular situations, including migrants, are predominantly vulnerable to exploitation. For example, migrant workers who encountered Hurricane Katrina which hit the US Gulf Coast in September 2005, had difficulty in accessing aid due to fears of reprisals and deportation, or, loss of identity documents (IOM, 2007). Their working conditions and working characteristics also shaped the degree of the impact of the natural disaster on migrants. For example, low-income migrant and seasonal farm workers are susceptible to the effects of natural disasters since their location in rural areas is usually due to a lack of resources needed (Burke et al, 2012). At the time of the great earthquake, an estimated 2 million foreigners registered resided in Japan (Ministry of Justice Japan, 2012). Given millions of foreigners, only a limited amount of the literature explores empirical evidence of the impact of the disaster(s) on migrant workers,’ employment and working conditions. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and explores migrant workers’ needs and challenges in the area of employment and livelihoods in the post-disaster period. It also recommends policies implications based on the empirical lessons learned by on the ground surveys. This study focuses on migrant workers in the Tohoku area who are semi-and low-
skilled workers and minorities\(^1\). The targeted areas consists of three prefectures (Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima) located in Tohoku, which was the hardest hit by the Tsunami which caused the great earthquake (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Map of Three Prefectures Affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake](image)

1.1 Terminology

The International Labour Organization (ILO) C143\(^2\) defines a “migrant worker” as a person who migrates or who has migrated from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his own account, and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant worker. In Japan, migrant workers refer to government documents as foreign workers. The definitions of the migrant workers in this study are defined as non-Japanese nationalities and/or minority ethnic background workers.

1.2 Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This paper highlights on employment and their working conditions after the natural disaster. Migrants are living in a vulnerable context and once a disaster incurs, three key components arise which include humanitarian, socio-economic and socio-political aspects. Laws are affected through labour and employment-related issues and through direct and indirect channels. These are transformed into structured/group processes which affect the livelihood of people. The framework of this study is shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Framework of the study](image)

It is clear that employment creation and income generation are central to the reconstruction process. Not only the demand side, but also the supply side should be addressed for job creation. Employment creation programmes must address stabilisation, community reintegration as well as developing a response package that promotes socio-economic reintegration (Cazes et al, 2009).

This study employs in-depth interviews, in-person, phone interviews, and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in Thai, English and Japanese and the total number of respondent migrants was 36. A structured interview was developed to ensure a thorough list of assessments with respect to livelihood, especially with regard to employment and work-related issues. A total of seven stakeholder meetings with key informants of government, NGOs and academia were conducted to capture existing mechanisms for migrant workers.

\(^1\) The top two nationalities of migrant workers in Japan i.e. Chinese, Korean whom account for around 58 percent of total registered foreigners will not be participating in in-depth interviews and focus groups due to the focus of the paper is on the minority.

\(^2\) Article 11, Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers No.143 (Entry into force: 09 Dec 1978)
From September to December 2014, 9 small focus groups, 12 in-person interviews and 9 phone interviews were conducted in Thai, English and Japanese by one trained bilingual facilitator and one Thai native interviewer. The total number of migrants interviewed was 36. All responses were kept anonymously. A structured interview was developed to ensure the thorough list of assessment on employment and working condition. Yet, the facilitator/researcher probed the participants’ responses whenever necessary to further explore the topics and discussions.

In addition, a total of 7 stakeholder meetings with key informants of government, NGOs and academia were conducted to capture existing mechanisms for migrant workers, the assistant accessibility, and challenges in providing assistance to migrant workers. A developed framework from a difference-to-differences analysis is used to estimate and analyze impacts of the great earthquake on livelihood, employment and working conditions. The developed framework can be depicted as shown in Figure 3.

Phase 1 is a period of pre-natural disaster. A level of satisfaction of livelihood and employment before natural disruptions is set by each individual. The direction can be depicted by upward, constant, or downward level depending on their satisfaction on livelihood and work. Figure 3 represents Phase 1 with the upward satisfaction level (ab line).

Phase 2 describes a post-disaster adjustment period of each individual after natural disasters. Given external factors, except the occurrence of the natural disaster, remain the same; impacts can be described into 3 changes:

- Level change: a change in levels of satisfaction and future expectation of victims, which resulting in their sudden levels of satisfaction. The level change is normally a result of a direct impact on victims. After natural disruptions, if victims can revive at their previous level of expectation, the change is assumed to increase in line with the level of prior expectation (bc line). The level of changes reflects the actual effect on natural disaster disruption to the victim; for example, the damage and loss in personal belongings in the manageable limit.

- Gradual change: a gradual change of expectation due to surrounding alteration and thus impact on the victim in either direct or indirect manner (bd line). For example, though one’s properties and life do not physically injured by a disaster, he may be affected by the disaster-surrounding environment, which cause him mental disorder and gradually lower the satisfaction and future expectation of his life.

- Combined change: a change due to the combination of two effects may simultaneously impact on the victim. The level change may be found in association with either a decrease or increase in gradual change (cf line to cg line). For example, a decrease in both level changes and gradual changes, if the victim faces a direct impact and cannot return to the prior level of satisfaction. A parent-loss child due to a disaster will be affected immediately and will also draw long-term difficulties, both emotionally and psychologically.

Normally, all assistances, as well as government policies, will intervene on the post-recovery period in order to make sure that victims of natural disasters can move to transition period smoothly.

Phase 3 is the period after the survivals move to their steady state, or at the stage that they set their own level of livelihood and satisfaction.

![Figure 3. Analytical framework of natural disasters effecting on livelihood and employment](image-url)
2. Overview of Migrant Workers in Japan

This section aims to investigate the current surroundings of migrant workers that shape their survival mechanisms, especially on employment and working condition.

2.1 Employment arrangements

The majority of migrant workers in Japan were employed indirectly in the manufacturing sector. Japan absorbs a large number of overseas migrant workers with short-term employment contracts and an increase in non-regular working status (Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 2008; Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, 2010). Migrants are employed by labour contractors and dispatched to production lines with a three month or shorter employment contract. Consequently, migrants are likely to be exempted from social security in Japan since they usually work as part-time workers, temporary workers and work in very small enterprises/ and/or family enterprises.

Under current legislation, the government does not allow unskilled migrant workers to work in Japan, but international interns, called ‘industrial training’ and ‘technical internships’ can be employed for two years and is used as a channel to obtain cheap labour. The internships mix training with employment in which workers are subjected to 40 working hours per week, overtime pay, minimum wage and compensation for injuries, illness or death at the workplace or during their commutes.

2.2 Wages and Working Condition of Migrant Workers

Minimum wage is a tool of fair and appropriate employment protection, payment of wages and adequate access to decent working and living conditions. Most low-skilled migrant workers are paid minimum wage, though some may have wages deducted for their food, accommodation and utilities. The percentage of wage deductions is varied and based upon the migrants’ workplace (e.g. Minami, 2008; Tanno, 2010).

Though, no cases reported minimum wage violations, other measurements are found to be use on migrant workers; for example, “good attendance bonuses” which is a bonus that is paid if the person works on specific working days stipulated by the employer. One case study provided by Tanno (2010), revealed that one migrant took leave for a class observation of his child. As a result, the migrant wage was deducted substantially. He complained to his employer about the deduction. The worker was sent to another factory and was terminated within three months; he secured no health insurance or pension during his employment.

Accessibility to medical and health care is a major challenge faced by migrants. The challenges are even greater for irregular migrants because they are likely to have lesser, if any, health care entitlements, protection under occupational health and safety laws or access to redress mechanisms. Particularly irregular migrants, who do not avail of such services, seek assistance from NGOs, local level initiatives, sacred places and friends rather than their national embassies (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2011).

3. Foreign Residents Before and After the Great Earthquake

As of 2012, the Immigration Bureau of Japan reported the number of registered migrants at 2,038,159. The number of foreign residents in Japan has grown significantly from 1990 at around 1 million to more than double in 2010. The Tohoku region produces 2.5 per cent of the total Japanese economy. Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) estimates a total of 841,000 workers and 88,000 businesses were directly affected by the 2011 Great Earthquake. As of April 25th, 2011, 73 foreign residents were killed/missing (Omagari, 2012: 1). The number of foreigners has decreased from 40,000 people or 2 percent of the total foreign residents at the end of 2011.

3 Health Insurance and Employees’ Pension Insurance are public insurance programs which cover all workers (regardless of their nationality) in private companies except for very small businesses and short-term workers. Residents of Japan who are not covered by these or any other programs are covered by National Health Insurance and National Pension.
As seen from Figure 4, the number of foreign residents in three prefectures was reduced from 1.5 in 2010 to 1.4 per cent in 2011 (Figure 3). However, in the following year, the share had slightly increased to 1.42 due to an increase in the foreign residents in Miyagi and Iwate, but not in Fukushima. This was due to the damage of the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant located near the earthquake. The disaster disabled the reactor cooling systems, leading to releases of radioactivity which triggered a 30 km evacuation zone surrounding the plant. By 2012, there was no official sign of radiation contamination which psychologically affected the confidence of people living and working in the Fukushima area.

![Figure 4. Number of foreign residents in 3 prefectures affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (person) Source: Ministry of Justice Immigration Bureau, Japan](image)

### 4. Result and Discussion: Impact of the 2011 Great Earthquake on Employment and Livelihood

This section describes the result of the study in 2 main impacts: (1) humanitarian, socio-economic and socio-political aspect, and (2) employment and working conditions. However, the key focus is on the second session as a key target of the study.

The semi-structured interviews of 36 migrant workers were conducted with a focus on the impact on their employment and working conditions after the disaster up to December 2013 (See migrants’ profile in Table 1). In addition to migrant workers, four government officials of the countries of origin, and two NPOs (Tokyo International Communication Committee, and CRASH), as well as one academia, were interviewed to reflect various aspects in providing assistance to migrants in relation to the great earthquake.

### Table 1 Interviewees’ profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male = 19; Female =17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age 20 – 30 = 21; Age 31 – 40 = 12; Age 41 – 60 = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married = 12; Not married= 21; Divorced=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years in Japan</td>
<td>≤ 5 years = 5; 6-10 years= 12; 11-15 years= 8; 16 and over = 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Indonesia=6; Thailand = 12; Philippines= 6; Brazil = 7; Vietnam = 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ interviews and focus groups

#### 4.1 Impact on Humanitarian, Socio-economic and Socio-political Aspect

This section aims to reflect surrounding conditions that impacted migrants’ expectations and the adaptation of migrant workers on employment and working conditions.

##### 4.1.1 Lack of Preparation toward National Risks

Generally, migrant workers perceived natural risks they will face in the country of destination, but lack appropriate preparation. As Japan is a well-known country for earthquakes, most migrant workers considered themselves at risk. However, their knowledge on preparation for disasters is limited. Migrants commonly lack of proper knowledge for an emergency, i.e., no emergency kit in the house, no evacuation plan, a deficiency in knowledge, or, of what should be included in an emergency kit/situation. It is clear that among low-income immigrants, not only is there a lack of knowledge, but, there is also different attitudes among people about disaster preparedness.

Two interviewees, who had passed training on the natural disaster at their pre-arrival training, explained that they could not imagine the actual effect of a disaster and were embodied by moral hazards before they faced...
the physical hazard. Moreover, those people that came from prone to natural disaster countries tend to have a better understanding and a superior preparedness than those from the no prone to natural-disaster countries, since prior experience to disasters prompted them for future disasters, which is harmonized with Eisenman et al (2009) and Bolin et al (1998)’s studies. However, the Fukushima nuclear plant was a new experience, even for those from a disaster-prone country in that they did not know what to do in this case.

4.1.2 Migrants’ Acknowledgement on Availability of Sources of Information.
Linguistic barriers and inaccessibility to “understandable” information are the main problem for foreigners. Not only other languages, but also simple Japanese in multi-languages is necessary for public information. For those who cannot understand Japanese well, some have been assisted and suggested survival strategies and news updated by their Japanese friends. Since most of foreigners mostly work all the time and they don’t know Japanese, they did not receive any information on natural disasters beforehand and do not know what they should do to protect themselves. For those who have limited ability to understand Japanese and could not contact friends, causes them to become isolated from necessary information. An informative website was established by an academic institution to disseminate multilingual information during that time, yet none of the interviewees acknowledge the existence of this website due to the late establishment of the website. The limitation of up-to-date information, especially as to the possibility of the reoccurrence of earthquakes (Aftershocks), caused long-term psychological effects on victims.
This occurred not only on the migrant side, but also on the expectation to provide assistance by international communities. Despite a number of multi-language information provided by NGOs’ efforts and the Japanese government, a lack of multilingual pieces of information led to difficulties in order to access specific assistance.

4.2 Employment and Working Conditions
The impact of natural disasters on employment and working conditions is classified into three focus areas: (1) employment (2) wages and (3) working conditions. The result of the interviews and analyses suggests that each group of employment was impacted by the disaster differently. Different types of migrants’ can roughly identify where they sought assistance and this was followed by the impact and expectations for employment. The analysis of the respondents in the study are grouped and described around the impact on employment as shown in Table 2.
None of the interviewees were unemployed. In fact, an important factor that drives them to work continuously is “poverty,” as a poverty trap bounded them to continue working. Though none of the interviewees in this study were dismissed, some of their migrants’ friends were. Those cases were found in SMEs on unspecific basis—based on the interviewees’ perspective, no was no different treatment among employees. All respondents pointed out that they understood the situation and their employers’ decision.
All of the interviewees did not work overtime for over two years since the great earthquake. For manufacturing workers, a reduction in overtime payment had substantially affected their total income. 22.2 per cent of the respondents did not have savings. Thus, as a result, 16.7 per cent have borrowed money from informal sources. Currently, 5.6 out of 16.7 per cent are still in debt. The differences in wage losses vary upon economic structures. For example, in the case of the 1998 flood in Bangladesh, wages were directly linked to long-term declines, especially in the agricultural sector (Mueller and Quisumbing, 2010)
Natural disasters normally lead to a temporary downturn in economic activities. Disposable personal incomes dropped as a result of the natural disaster. Migrant workers who received wages per head of workers i.e. massages and restaurants were substantially reduced in total income because of the smaller number of tourists and Japanese clients.
Migrant workers in the manufacturing sector have seen a reduction of their total working hours for saving electricity measures due to nuclear plant shutdowns. The decrease in electricity had led to a decrease in work hours and in total workers’ income.

Migrant workers are subjected to labour insurance and social insurance under national treatment practices. However, due to the exemptions in legislation, lack of knowledge about the insurance coverage, as well as complicated procedures and paper work cause main obstacles to access to a social safety net. A number of migrants working in SME/family businesses are not entitled to social security because those businesses are not insurance-applied businesses. A number of migrant workers were working two part-time jobs in order to earn living wages. No workplace is responsible for the multiple part-time jobholder, and social security registrations.

On the other hand, migrant workers who already have coverage under Labour and Social Insurance still do not have a clear understand about their coverage, the benefits and how to get compensation, which are similar to the finding of Omagari (2012). A number of migrants had to deal with the paper work in Japanese for provisional housing and filing for insurance compensation. Migrant wives who lost husbands tended to face a serious struggle since their Japanese husbands were likely to work in small family businesses. In addition, receiving compensation and insurance sometimes became an agreement to a counterparts’ family.

Informal mechanisms is the best way for migrants to access assistance since migrants preferred to get informal assistance; they gathered at their familiar places, started to help each other, and became a small community. Though the shelter management had to be improved, especially first aid knowledge and record systems of survival, it provided substantial benefits for workers working in the informal sector and SMEs. The assistance within the migrant communities has been provided by colleagues through their expertise. One common activity among migrants was translating news from Japanese to their own language. This situation is similar to the study of Bartashius (2012), of a Filipina community in Fukushima Prefecture in the evacuation centers and temporary shelters. As a result of the gathering, 13.9 percent were introduced to another place for their employment from the informal network.

Currently, there are networks by migrants’ nationalities as a result of their gathering during the 2011 Great Earthquake. One of the important preparation measures for a next possible disaster is to strengthen the migrants’ formation. The Japanese government can directly communicate to the migrant associations update situations and necessary information to migrants.

Table 2. Impact on labour-related aspects by type of employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of employment</th>
<th>Place of gathering</th>
<th>Impact on employment</th>
<th>Impact on wages and working condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working as trainees or arrived or in-company transferred (Male = 11, Female = 5)</td>
<td>Their branch/head office(s) in Japan as well as the accommodation provided by the</td>
<td>Migrants are likely to be employed in the companies and were likely to stay in their companies though wage cuts or deduction of overtime work. Omagari (2012:4) point out that trainees and interns cannot leave the country and job easily. They were stranded by regulations and contracts to complete their agreed assignment, regardless of the origin of the contract, Japan or sending countries.</td>
<td>Their wages were deducted for rental cost, electricity, gasoline, lunch, tax. They averaged 90,000 yen per month net. The wage rate per hour has remained the same but total income was reduced due to the lack of overtime work since the earthquake. This was due to the economic slowdown. All cases asked for help and information from Japanese colleagues for consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of employment</td>
<td>Place of gathering</td>
<td>Impact on employment</td>
<td>Impact on wages and working condition</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with small and/or family businesses, (Male = 3, Female = 9)</td>
<td>Sacred places i.e. temples, churches and their workplace</td>
<td>Migrants are likely to be employed but accept wage deductions and/or work without pay at the early stage of post-natural disasters. This group normally holds two jobs.</td>
<td>All interviewees work part-time in the service sector, i.e. restaurants, or massage shops. The total income has been reduced due to the economic downturn. They normally chose one key work place to be a source of employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working and married to Japanese (Male=1, Female = 3)</td>
<td>Government’s temporary shelters or move to spouse’s home in elsewhere</td>
<td>If migrants stayed with their families, they were likely to stop working until their families finished resettlement. If they were single parents without family support, they were likely to stay in employment to ensure survival income.</td>
<td>Most workers in this category have worked in the service sectors. Thus, they were directly affected by the economic downturn. Those whos spouses passed away can be classified into two cases: Those</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irregular migrants (Male=4)</td>
<td>Seek for help from sacred places or NGOs. In case they could not help themselves, or face a serious physical pain.</td>
<td>All respondents indicated that they are still working. All respondents are working as agricultural workers. They moved from the Tohoku area to elsewhere for jobs.</td>
<td>The number of working hours was reduced by the number of working days in a week. They were asked to be ready for stand-by. If they considered returning to their home countries, they were likely to surrender themselves to the Japanese immigration office. However, none of them expressed the interest to return to their home countries. They said, “I don’t know what to do in the homeland…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors from interviews and focus groups
During the disaster, a number of humanitarian assistance groups had attempted to provide aid to migrants through various channels, however, based on migrants’ experiences, a number of limitations prevailed, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Assistance by various stakeholders and migrants perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embassy/government of countries of origin</th>
<th>Interview with the representative of each group</th>
<th>Migrant workers’ opinion toward labour and employment policies during the crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All migrant embassies had made the best effort to reach their people. Nevertheless, the type of assistances and the number of days varied upon nationality and their existing database, since the information on the migrants resided in Japan was compiled by the Immigration Bureau and would be provided upon request.</td>
<td>All governments’ respondents on employment expressed an unclear policy on providing special public employment services or reintegration in their countries.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|Japanese Government| Japanese Government had provided assistance to migrants on humanitarian assistance and supplied rescue packages to all registered households. However, since the assistances were allocated according to the records, a number of unregistered people were inaccessible to humanitarian assistance from local governments, in particularly irregular migrants.|On labour-related policy, the Japanese government initiated the project “Japan as One” to support disaster victims’ employment and living by Japan focusing on creating employment opportunities for the disaster victims and utilizing the companies and resources affected by the disaster. The project includes job creation through the revival and reconstruction of the local economy and industries, integrated support for industrial development and employment and training of personnel who contribute to reconstruction and support for placement of people in stable jobs. Still, the vulnerable group is difficult to access, including migrants who lost his/her Japanese spouse in the natural disaster. No migrant workers directly received assistance from this project. Only one of all interviewees had indirectly received the assistance though financial support for small and medium enterprises through her spouse’s local family business.|

|Local NGOs| The assistance provided by NGOs mainly supplied rescue package and food, reconstructing houses and buildings, as well as offering recreation and stress relief activities for the victims. All interviewees said that they did not directly receive any assistance from NGOs during the disaster, except one Thai in a form of knowledge dissemination. On the NGOs’ side, they faced difficulties in reaching out to migrants due to the lack of bilingual volunteers with commitment in working and living in the affected areas as well as insufficient financial supports for volunteers’ foods and transportation. However, as a result of immediate response to victims of the 2011 earthquake, local NGOs have been recognized and continuously supported by the rest of the world, yet to remain is the network and cooperation as the challenge. The labour-related assistance of local NGOs is mainly provided through vocational training in the post-disaster period. But, only some of them can achieve and work as the main source of income since they have a lack of entrepreneurship. The vocational training was considered to be leisure activities which may lead to small money while staying in shelters. However, these trainings hardly reached the migrants since they needed multilingual trainers. The trainings were focused on Japanese communities.|

|Source: Authors from in-depth interview|

5 Lessons Learned Discussion on Employment and Labour-related Policies and Measures
The experiences of migrant workers and reflections from stakeholders, as well as the
previous literature have led to a number of analytical aspects as follows:

- **Up-to-Date Multilingual Information and Employment Services**

  The first priority of all victims is timely and accurate pieces of necessary information. Therefore, multilingual information must be available throughout media channels, including call centres for mobile network and social media. This should be associated with accessibility to employment services in other areas and in other countries for temporary migration. Information dissemination and capacity building to migrants for social security, health insurance and labour and social insurance should be widely and continuously distributed to the focal point of migrants’ networks to ensure an effective mechanism for assistance.

  Furthermore, communication networks are essential for consultations with families and their friends. A free internet and Wifi connection in temporary shelters, if possible, will enhance their accessibility to sources of information and to outreach to other people.

  It must be noted that during the disaster, a number of multi-language hotlines/information centres had been established, yet none of the interviewed migrants in this study acknowledged such hotlines/centres. Therefore, the existing sources of assistance and knowledge should be regularly promoted to ensure the ready knowledge for places or assistance once civilians face any natural disaster. Continuously and regularly promoting information on policy for migrants’ legal and working status will help them understand the situation and create precise scenarios for future employment.

  A compliant and monitoring mechanism should be established to ensure the effectiveness of non-discriminate practices in response to all forms of natural disasters. Local governors, as well as people and organizations in the area are keys to generate this mechanism since geographical differences may require a specific type of mechanism.

- **Enhance Networking for Better Information Dissemination and Outreach**

  Activities and Providing Employment Options

  An effective preparedness mechanism must be compliant with victims’ behavior and characteristics. Since workers in the service sector and SMEs rely on informal mechanisms, the information on natural disaster preparedness, labour trainings and employment options should consistently be communicated through this channel. These places include religious sacred places, previous temporary shelters, NGOs focusing on migrants’ issue, language schools and their workplaces.

  For immediate assistance, quick information flow from the Immigration Bureau to foreign embassies in order to ensure immediate assistances and employment-related information for all groups of people must be available. The area of high density of migrants of each nationality will facilitate humanitarian assistance planning to reach out to irregular migrant workers, who are uncovered by official record. This assistant requires all parties involved, including the Japanese government, local government, foreign governments, NGOs as well as employers’ and workers’ organizations to take part in information sharing, thus, ensuring effectiveness and fair accessibility.

- **Ensure Policy Inclusions of All Vulnerable Groups, in Particularly, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, and in High Intensity of Migrants’ Occupations**

  A limited accessibility to employment and labour policies and projects of migrants suggests that they should be one of the target groups as considered vulnerable groups. Future recovery programs should consider this assistance through informal channels and tap more resources to small and family businesses.

- **Promote the Reintegration Policies and Employment Options in Countries of Origin**

  According to the interviews, all interviewees did not acknowledge a reintegration programme. They are still in employment in Japan, but with a decrease in total income. One of the key reasons to stay in Japan was that they do not acknowledge any information about job
options in their home country. Then a reintegration programme together with the public employment services should be included in the assistance as an alternative option.

6 Conclusion and Recommendation

The 2011 great earthquake in Japan marked a great scar on the Tohoku area. It has generated considerable damages to all residents, including migrants, who are likely to struggle intensively during natural disasters. This research collected and compiled lessons and good practices regarding low-paid migrants in the Tohoku area. The study conducted primary data collection and in-depth analysis and employed a developed analytical framework using a difference-in-differences analysis to probe in a qualitative approach.

The study reflected 2 per cent reduction in the number of migrant workers after the disaster. However, the deepening impact had grown its roots to low-income migrants, which were not reflected in formal statistics. The crucial problems were a lack of preparedness for natural disasters and lack of access to up-to-date necessary information. Though a number of organizations provided multi-language media, including radio and internet-based information, apparently, none of the interviewees had acknowledged of such information. They sought help through informal mechanism and places of familiarity.

Their government, the Japanese government and NGOs attempted to reach them to provide humanitarian assistance. However, the limitation of the database of foreign embassies, the gap of official household registrations to the actual living, as well as the lack of multilingual staffs and financial supports, hindered outreach activities. In addition, labour-related policies were ineffective.

All 36 interviewees indicated that in 2013 they were still employed. However, their wage rate and overtime work had been reduced. The main reason is the necessity of survival due to the poverty trap. Overall, their total income dropped. Some of them were not covered by labour and social insurance, and there was a lack of knowledge for labour and social insurance as well as complicated paperwork for insurance claims.

From this study, a set of recommendations might include a study with a focus on employment and labour-related policies which would include up-to-date multilingual information and employment services, maintained and enhanced networking for better information dissemination on employment options; policy inclusion of all vulnerable groups; and promotion of reintegration policies, especially the employment options in the migrants’ home country.

Finally, another recommendation for future study is to identify the location of ethnic communities and gathering venues by nationalities/ languages and ethnicities for further practical assistance schemes in term of immediate assistance for labour and employment services.

Acknowledgment

This study is developed under a partial funding of the ILO project, namely The Japan Earthquake Project: Disseminating Lessons from Employment and Labour Measures for the Recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake from 1 August 2012 to 31 March 2014.

Reference


Burke, S., Jeffrey Bethel, and Amber Foreman Britt (2012) Assessing Disaster Preparedness among Latino Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers in Eastern North


Author description

Ruttiya Bhula-or is a PhD candidate in University of Tokyo. Her fields of interests are labour economics, migration, skills development and socio-economic development.

Yukio Ikemoto is a professor affiliated with Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo, Japan.