



NOTE

This is an excerpt from IDMC's 2019 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID).

SPOTLIGHT

JAPAN

Disaster evacuations and the importance of resilience

Located at the intersection of three tectonic plates and in the path of seasonal typhoons, Japan is prone to a range of hazards that have the potential to trigger large-scale displacement and cause significant damage to homes and infrastructure. Last year was no exception. Storms, floods, flash floods, landslides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions triggered more than 146,000 new displacements.

The country has, however, developed significant resilience to the disasters natural hazards can cause.¹³⁴ Most new displacements recorded were pre-emptive evacuations, which are an effective measure to reduce loss of life when people are exposed to hazards. Japan's ability to manage disaster risk via early warning systems and evacuation schemes is generally effective at reducing impacts, but last year showed that citizens are not always as responsive as they could be.

Disaster displacement events in 2018 ranged from two people displaced by a landslide in Oita prefecture in April to more than 30,000 by typhoon Prapiroon in early July.¹³⁵ Less than three weeks after Prapiroon's rains triggered widespread flooding and landslides in south-west Japan, the same region was struck by typhoon Jongdari. The government issued pre-emptive evacuation orders for Jongdari, but research conducted in Hiroshima city suggests that less than four per cent of people heeded them.¹³⁶ Some of those who stayed put became trapped by landslides and rising floodwaters and more than 170 people died, making Jongdari Japan's deadliest weather-related disaster in decades.¹³⁷

When typhoon Jebi hit in August, citizens' responsiveness was similarly low. Japan's Cabinet Office ordered around 30,000 people to evacuate, but studies conducted in Kobe prefecture after the disaster showed that less than 10 per cent had followed the order. Power cuts prevented some people from receiving the order, while others were unable to hear it over the sound of



the wind and rain. In some areas the order to evacuate was issued after flooding had begun.¹³⁸ Jebi was the most powerful typhoon to hit Japan in 25 years, and the magnitude of the disaster did help to raise awareness about the importance of pre-emptive evacuations among affected communities.¹³⁹ Around half of the respondents in Kobe said they would evacuate next time if they received a similar order.¹⁴⁰

Evacuations associated with earthquakes appear to paint a very different picture. A pre-emptive order to evacuate issued to 100 people before a 6.6 magnitude earthquake that struck Hokkaido in September was heeded by 12,000.¹⁴¹ The earthquake triggered landslides that caused casualties and significant damage, including a power cut that affected 5.3 million people.¹⁴² The evacuation order was issued early enough, however, to allow people in the city of Sapporo to flee to safer areas before it struck. This suggests that the Japanese public is more sensitised to the dangers of earthquakes than those of flooding, in part perhaps because of the amount of media attention the former receive.

The government took steps to improve its disaster response in 2018 with the pre-positioning of supplies in evacuation centres, as opposed to sending them after the event at the request of municipal authorities.¹⁴³ It also recognised the phenomenon of "at-home evacuees", people who remain in their damaged homes after a disaster but use facilities at evacuation centres because of the disruption caused to the supply of water, electricity and other basic services. Some may also have



A man in an evacuation centre in Okayama Prefecture, organised by the Japanese Red Cross. Photo: Japanese Red Cross Society, July 2018

to rely on humanitarian assistance for food and non-food items.¹⁴⁴

Others seek shelter outside officially designated evacuation areas, and these “self-evacuees” tend not to be included in disaster recovery efforts. Some people who evacuated by their own means during the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake, for example, faced significant challenges in accessing housing and other basic services earmarked for evacuees because they did not figure in official government records.¹⁴⁵ Addressing the issue of at-home and self-evacuees would be an important step in ensuring that all displaced people are able to achieve durable solutions. Not having provisions for those who evacuate on their own can create inequalities in compensation mechanisms and increase the risk of protracted displacement.

The disasters that struck Japan in 2018 showed that even in a well-prepared country there is still room for improvement. With the very high level of exposure of people and assets to hazards, the country will need to continuously invest in reducing disaster risk further and responding more comprehensively to those displaced. A

number of challenges remain, including raising disaster risk awareness at the local level and ensuring that early warning systems are effective so that timely and well-disseminated evacuation orders are issued and heeded. More comprehensive data on the movement of people during and several months or even years after the event is also needed. Beyond pre-emptive evacuations, there is a lack of information on how long displacement lasts, when people return or where they resettle or integrate locally.

| Notes

134. Cabinet Office Japan, "White Paper, Disaster Management in Japan 2017", 2017.
135. Cabinet Office Japan, "The July 2018 Heavy Rainfall Emergency Response Headquarters: Disaster Prevention Information", 2018.
136. Based on an extrapolation from a survey conducted by the Prefectural University of Hiroshima on the needs of evacuees and issues related to shelter management in Hiroshima, Okayama and Ehime following Typhoon Jongdari, only 400 out of the 10,000 people surveyed were considered evacuees, The Japan Times Online, "Only 3.6 percent of Hiroshima residents had evacuated when July rain disaster struck", August 3, 2018.
137. The Japan Times Online, "Japan hit by worst weather disaster in decades", July 11, 2018.
138. Takabatake et al., "Field Survey of 2018 Typhoon Jebi in Japan", November 2018.
139. The Straits Times, "Powerful Typhoon Jebi kills at least 10 in Japan; 3,000 stranded at Kansai airport transferred to Kobe by boat", September 5, 2018.
140. Takabatake et al., "Field Survey of 2018 Typhoon Jebi in Japan", November 2018.
141. Cabinet Office Japan, "Damage situation on Heisei 30 Hokkaido Eastern Chubu Earthquake: Disaster Prevention Information Page", 2018.
142. Reuters, "Power returning to Hokkaido, but quake exposes flaws of Japan grid", September 7, 2018.
143. Cabinet Office Japan, "White Paper, Disaster Management in Japan 2017", 2017.
144. Information provided by Japan Platform - Emergency humanitarian aid organization, available at, <https://www.japanplatform.org/E/>.
145. Cabinet Office Japan, "White Paper, Disaster Management in Japan 2017", 2017.