
Outline and Effects of the Comprehensive Support Project for the Long-Term Unemployed

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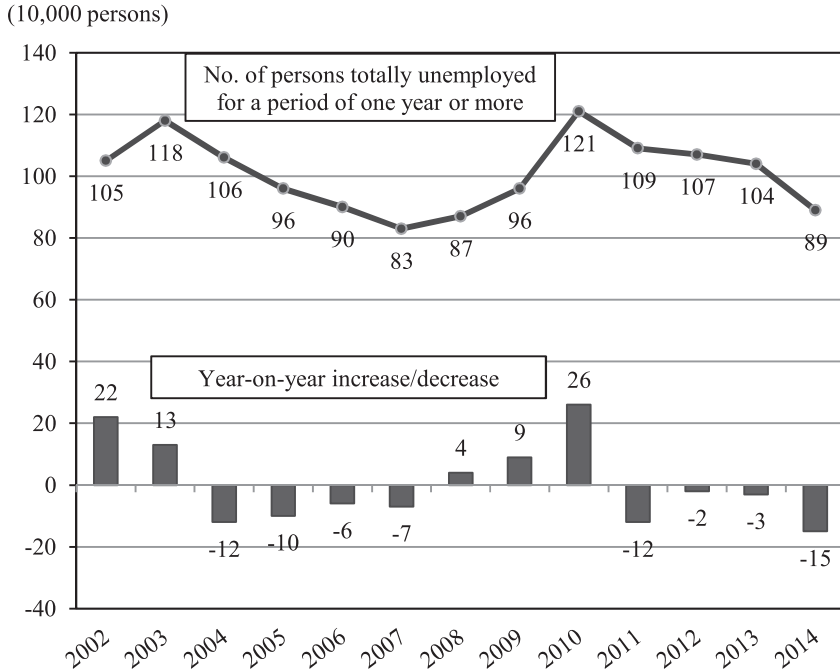
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Since fiscal 2011, some of Japan's prefectural Labour Bureaus have been implementing the Comprehensive Support Project for the Long-term Unemployed so as to strengthen and enhance re-employment programs for the long-term unemployed who have not worked for one year or more, or job seekers that are at high risk of falling into this category. The Project is based around the job placement system operated by the nationwide network of Public Employment Security Offices, and also encompasses employment seminars, job introductions, support for stabilization in the workplace, and career counseling by contracted private-sector employment placement businesses. As an example of the program's effectiveness, in fiscal 2013 the number of job seekers for which support commenced was 4,120, and the number of job placements for people who began receiving support in this fiscal year was 3,050. Feedback from beneficiaries of the program includes comments such as, "Thanks to thorough counseling, which began with identification of problem areas and went on to cover setting of goals and approaches to achieving them, I was able to achieve job placement," and "The program helped me improve my communication skills."

1. Background of Project Implementation

According to the Labour Force Survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, among totally unemployed persons, the number of persons whose duration of unemployment (the length of time for which a person has not worked, but has been looking for a job or preparing to launch a business, etc.) is one year or longer averaged 960,000 in a given month in 2009, but in 2010 surged to 1.21 million, and stayed above one million for several years thereafter (the average for a given month in 2014, according to monthly reports, had fallen to 890,000) (See Figure 1) .

Under these difficult circumstances, there are concerns about duration of unemployment being prolonged yet further, and as a countermeasure, the government of Japan has been implementing the Comprehensive Support Project for the Long-term Unemployed (referred to below as "the Project") with funds allocated under the third supplementary budget of fiscal 2011 so as to strengthen and enhance re-employment programs for the long-term unemployed, or job seekers that are at high risk of falling into this category. The Project is based around the job placement system operated by the nationwide network of Public Employment Security Offices (referred to below as "Employment Security Offices"), and also encompasses employment seminars, job introductions, support for stabilization in the workplace, and career counseling by contracted private-sector employment placement businesses.



Source: Labour Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation).

Figure 1. Change in Number of Persons Totally Unemployed for a Period of One Year or More

Figure 2 shows an outline of the Project, including the status of cooperation between the Employment Security Office and contracted private-sector employment placement businesses (referred to below as “contractors”). This article provides an overview of efforts by the Employment Security Office to provide job-seeking support to the long-term unemployed, in part by applying know-how obtained from contracted private-sector employment placement businesses.

2. Project Implementation Regions

Out of the 47 prefectural Labour Bureaus overseeing the operations of Employment Security Offices, in fiscal 2014 there were 15 Labour Bureaus selected to implement the Project according to degree of need. In fiscal 2015, however, with the number of the long-term unemployed declining, the Project is being implemented only by some Labour Bureaus with jurisdiction over major urban areas (Hokkaido, Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka), those in the prefectures hardest hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011 (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima), and those in prefectures with large numbers of earthquake and tsunami evacuees from Fukushima prefecture (Yamagata, Niigata).

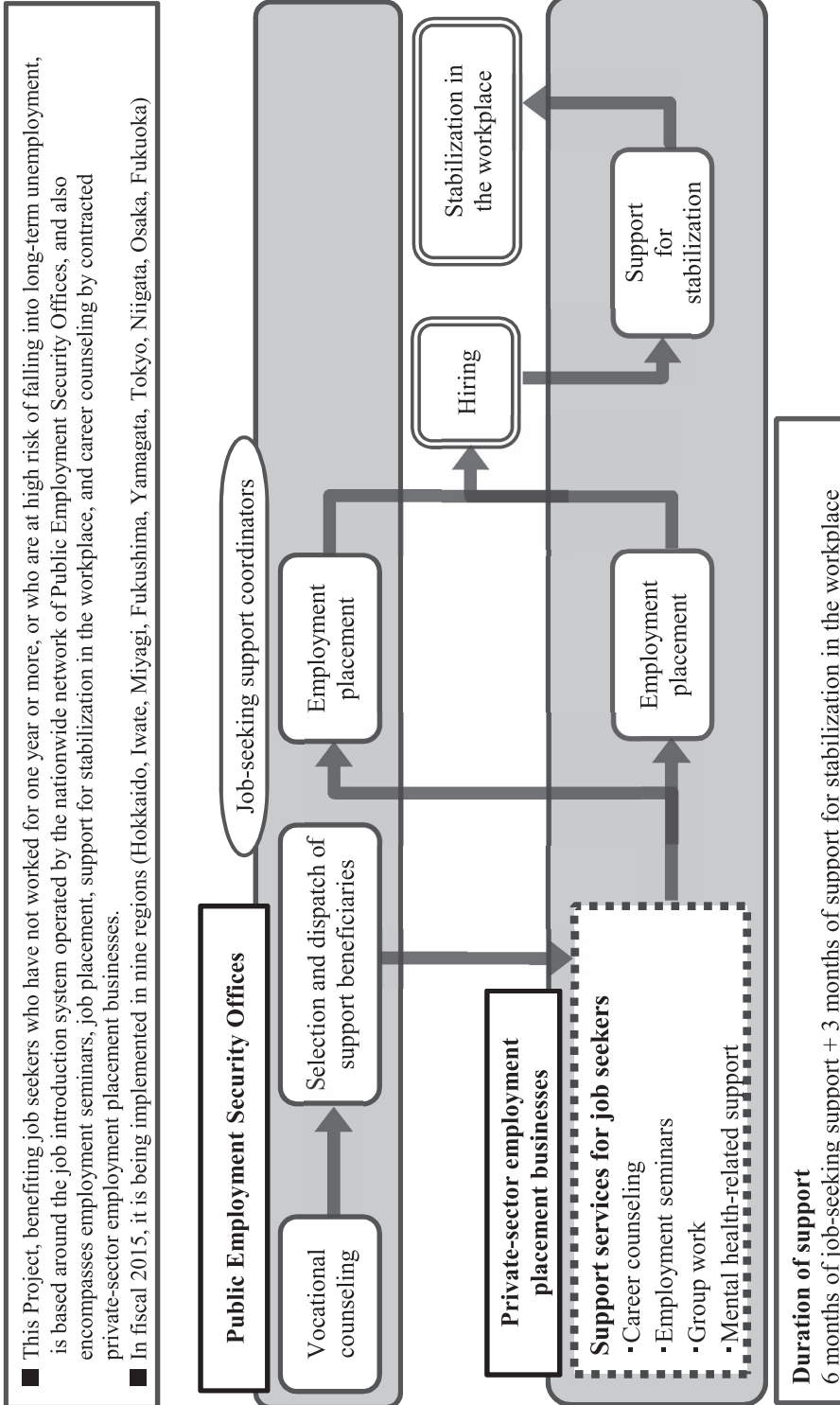


Figure 2. Comprehensive Support Project for the Long-Term Unemployed

3. Project Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the Project are job seekers at Employment Security Offices who meet all of the following criteria as of the last day of the month before support begins:

- (i) Persons who have not worked for one year or more, or those whose period without working is less than a year but who are judged to be at high risk of falling into long-term unemployment, and are recognized by the director of the Employment Security Office as being suitable for the Project
- (ii) Persons younger than 65 years of age
- (iii) Persons who, judging by the number of job counseling sessions they have received or number of jobs they have been introduced to, etc., appear to be actively seeking work through the Employment Security Office
- (iv) Persons who wish to receive support from private-sector employment placement businesses
- (v) Persons who have not received support through the Project in the past, and are not currently Project beneficiaries at another Employment Security Office
- (vi) Persons who are not currently in, or scheduled to undergo, vocational training

4. Description of Support Provided

Each fiscal year, Labour Bureaus implementing the Project select contractors from among private-sector employment placement businesses recognized as having the capability to implement the Project appropriately, and the contractors provide job seekers introduced by the Employment Security Office (referred to below as “beneficiaries”) with support as follows:

(1) Job-Seeking Support

(a) Orientation

An orientation is held on the day that support begins, and beneficiaries are given an explanation of the support to be provided, schedules, and utilization procedures. Their current circumstances are verified, and they undergo vocational aptitude tests. After the orientation, they quickly receive their first career counseling session, and a Re-employment Support Plan is prepared for each individual beneficiary. This Plan outlines the current status of the beneficiary’s job-seeking activities, identifies specific job-seeking support issues and approaches, and sets forth the schedule of job-seeking activities, target date for starting work, and the contents of support to be provided. Thereafter, the contents of the Plan may be revised and modified as needed based on the progress of support, after consulting with beneficiaries.

In providing job-seeking support, contractors do not simply wait for requests for help from beneficiaries, but depending on the beneficiary’s situation, may actively make pro-

posals for various forms of support and take the necessary steps to maintain his or her job-seeking motivation. Emphasis is placed on flexibility, and when beneficiaries have a particularly urgent need for employment, the Re-employment Support Plan may be modified or the curriculum fast-tracked so as to meet their needs to the greatest possible extent.

(b) Individual Career Counseling

A career counselor is assigned to each beneficiary, and provides him or her with personalized one-on-one counseling. Depending on the circumstances and wishes of the beneficiary, this counseling may entail individualized advice and guidance including revision of documents such as resumes and work histories, and job interview training such as mock interviews and review and analysis of interview results. As a rule, career counseling is carried out face to face, but when requested by beneficiaries, counselors may communicate by telephone, e-mail, etc.

(c) Group Guidance through Employment Seminars

Employment seminars aim to provide knowledge, develop competency, and heighten professionalism through lectures and hands-on training, by instilling effective attitudes and approaches to job-seeking activities, encouraging beneficiaries to assess themselves and take stock of their employment histories, promoting understanding of the job market and various occupations, imparting the know-how for effective job seeking (how to prepare resumes and work histories and perform well in job interviews, etc.), and building computer skills, etc.

(d) Group Work

Under the guidance of a career counselor, beneficiaries exchange opinions and information on job seeking, strengthening social ties and boosting motivation. As a rule, the first group work session is held the first day Project support goes into effect.

(e) Counseling and Guidance on Lifestyle Habits

Depending on the circumstances and wishes of the beneficiary, support aimed at improving lifestyle habits for the purposes of job seeking or employment may be provided through group seminars or individual counseling.

(f) Mental Health-Related Support

Depending on the circumstances and wishes of the beneficiary, mental health support pertaining to job seeking may be provided through group seminars or individual counseling by psychiatric or medical professionals (clinical psychologists, psychiatric social workers, psychiatrists, public health nurses, or medical nurses).

(2) Employment Opportunity Development, Provision of Information on Available Jobs, and Introductions of Employers

(a) Employment Opportunity Development and Provision of Information on Available Jobs

“Employment opportunity development” is the process of securing employment opportunities by actively encouraging employers to register with the Employment Security Office. Within this framework, the process of attempting to secure employment opportunities compatible with the needs and competencies of specific individuals is known as “individual employment opportunity development.” In this Project, beneficiaries are assigned personnel to assist with employment opportunity development. Individual employment opportunity development is carried out and information provided, with the suitability and goals of individual beneficiaries taken into account.

(b) Job Placement

Once employment opportunities have been identified, beneficiaries are placed in jobs that align with their competencies and goals. When necessary, employers recruiting personnel may be asked to loosen some criteria so as to accommodate the beneficiaries.

Job offers received by the Employment Security Office can be utilized for job placement, only in cases where beneficiaries request it, but in such cases it is necessary for contractors to complete the procedure of receiving job offers submitted to the Employment Security Office, and to notify beneficiaries that the job offer in question is one received by the Employment Security Office. If the beneficiary wishes to be placed there and placement is actually achieved, contractors are required to notify the Employment Security Office without delay.

(3) Support for Stabilization in the Workplace

Once beneficiaries have been hired, they are provided with “support for stabilization in the workplace” in the form of individualized counseling on labor issues in the workplace, mental health, career formation, and so forth. This support is to be made available within one month after the beneficiary starts working, and to be offered at least three times thereafter at a frequency of at least once per month. As a rule this counseling is carried out face to face, but when requested by beneficiaries, counselors may communicate by telephone, e-mail, or post, etc.

As a rule, support for stabilization in the workplace is offered to all beneficiaries regardless of whether or not contractors handled their job placements, and whether or not they are regular employees. The only cases in which support is not provided are those where beneficiaries waive support. Regardless of whether support for stabilization in the workplace was carried out or not, contractors verify the workplace stabilization status of all beneficiaries three months after they have begun working, and file a report with the Labour Bureau.

5. Duration of Support

Support is provided until the end of the ninth month after it began (i.e. for a maximum of nine full months), with the job-seeking support, job placement, etc. described in section 4(1)(2) above implemented until the end of the sixth month (a maximum of six full months) and support for stabilization in the workplace described in section 4 (3) provided for three months after the beneficiary begins working.

However, job-seeking support or support for stabilization in the workplace may be terminated sooner if the beneficiary requests it or support becomes unnecessary because the beneficiary is undergoing vocational training, etc.

6. Operations Handled by the Employment Security Office

The Employment Security Office monitors the status of beneficiaries it has asked contractors to support, and provides additional job-seeking support by assigned counselors, planned job placement, job placement through encouragement of office visit, and individualized employment opportunity development making use of beneficiaries' documented work history as needed, aiming to synergize these measures with the job-seeking support provided by contractors, and to achieve beneficiaries' re-employment as soon as possible.

"Planned job placement" refers to the Employment Security Office proactively selecting job offers that can be recommendable to job seekers for application, and when job seekers who fit the criteria for those job offers visit the Office for vocational counseling, the Office actively advising them to apply for the job, hopefully leading to job placement. Meanwhile, "job placement through encouragement of office visit" refers to the Employment Security Office identifying job offers for which individual job seekers appear suitable, suggesting these job offers to job seekers and verifying their willingness or unwillingness to apply for them, and encouraging them to visit the Office and undergo vocational counseling, etc. leading to job placement.

Project beneficiaries are required to visit the Employment Security Office once a month and undergo vocational counseling, at which time the Employment Security Office asks about the status of job-seeking activities, support provided by contractors, etc., and uses information in the responses to suggest job offers to beneficiaries, work toward job placement, and provide guidance and advice to contractors.

For beneficiaries that have not yet been placed in jobs when the job-seeking support period expires, after confirming the wishes of the individual in question, the Employment Security Office provides follow-up support such as "job placement through encouragement of office visit," individualized counseling by assigned counselors, and sending of job offer information.

7. Project Operations

(1) Assignment of Job-Seeking Support Coordinators

The Labour Bureaus and Employment Security Offices implementing the Project assign job-seeking support coordinators to assist with implementation. These coordinators are selected from among candidates with career counseling or other qualifications, knowledge and experience with human resources and labor management at private-sector enterprises, or knowledge and experience with vocational counseling and job placement, and they handle operations at the Labour Bureau including administration of the beneficiary selection process, administrative support with contracts, communication and coordination between contractors and Employment Security Offices implementing the Project, and processing of complaints and consultations from beneficiaries, contractors, or other parties.

Job-seeking support coordinators assigned to Employment Security Offices are tasked with informing job seekers of the Project and explaining its content, handling vocational counseling and job placement, selecting beneficiaries and monitoring the status of support, and handling the complaints and consultations from beneficiaries, contractors, or other parties.

(2) Informing Job Seekers of the Project and Explaining Its Content

The Employment Security Office informs job seekers of the Project during vocational counseling sessions, over the telephone, or by distributing or mailing leaflets, and explains the details of the Project to job seekers who express an interest in utilizing it. When doing so, the Bureau encourages job seekers to consider carefully whether support provided through the Project is necessary for them to achieve employment, taking the current status of their job-seeking activities into account.

The job-seeking support provided by contractors is intended only as a supplement to job-seeking activities, and it is essential that support from private-sector contractors and the public Employment Security Office be simultaneous and coordinated. Project beneficiaries are expected to make active efforts to utilize contractors' support, and during the Project implementation period are expected to continue making active use of the Employment Security Office's job placement services. For this reason, as outlined in section 6 above, at the beginning of the support period, beneficiaries are asked to sign an application form acknowledging that they are required to visit the Employment Security Office once a month and undergo vocational counseling.

It is also explained to Project beneficiaries that when they are selected, the Employment Security Office informs contractors of their personal information (name, date of birth, contact information, qualifications and work history, job placement status, etc.)

(3) Selection of Beneficiaries

When job seekers who have received information and explanations from the Employment Security Office as outlined in (2) above express willingness to utilize the Project's services, it is reconfirmed that they meet the criteria in Section 3. They are then selected and the Labour Bureau informs contractors.

8. Project Implementation Status and Effects

Thus far this article has given an outline of the Comprehensive Support Project for the Long-term Unemployed. In terms of implementation, in fiscal 2013 the number of job seekers for which support commenced was 4,120, and the number of job placements for people whose support periods started in this fiscal year totaled 3,050.

According to personnel at the Labour Bureau, feedback from beneficiaries enumerates benefits of the Project such as: thorough counseling, which began with identification of reasons for failure to find employment and went on to cover setting of goals and approaches to achieving them, leading to job placement; seminars enabling job seekers to recapture a sense of optimism regarding job seeking and heighten their motivation; positive experiences interacting with other people who are similarly engaged in job-seeking activities, resulting in improvements in communication skills; and guidance with writing work history documents when seeking a job in a new field, enabling job seekers to organize themselves and find employment. Personnel also point to thorough support for stabilization in the workplace after job placement as a benefit of the Project.

To achieve swift re-employment of job seekers who have been out of work for long periods of time, it is vital to prepare individualized programs of support and handle individual needs in a detail-oriented manner based on job seekers' circumstances, for example by promoting understanding of the job market and self-assessment, encouraging beneficiaries to broaden their scope of target occupations, and building confidence by taking stock of their employment histories and thereby re-clarifying their competencies.

From these perspectives, the Project is effectively providing comprehensive and intensive support to job seekers belonging to or at risk of entering the ranks of the long-term unemployed, primarily utilizing the massive volume of job offers and nationwide network of the Employment Security Office, but also making use of the know-how of private-sector employment placement businesses.