

Submission written by:

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Input for UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement Call for Submission issued on March 12, 2020.

Rationale/background:

Displacement in the context of technological disasters tends to be extremely protracted, often due to lasting impacts of environmental contamination resulting from these events. Yet, displacement in such situations has received very little international attention so far, since technological disasters are considered to be rare events. Once such disasters happen, however, their impacts tend to be severe, complex and long-lasting. Moreover, intensification of disasters resulting from climate-change related extreme weather events pose greater risk to infrastructure at critical industrial facilities that are rapidly ageing in many parts of the world, while rapid urbanisation and industrialisation mean that greater amounts of populations are more likely to be exposed to such disasters. Seen in this light, there is a greater need for international policy discussion on internal displacement to reflect on the existing lessons of displacement triggered by technological disasters.

This submission seeks to bring for the Panel's attention the experiences of IDPs displaced by the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan, based on the research that I conducted as part of the United Nations University's (UNU) [Fukushima Global Communication Programme](#) between 2014 and 2016. The dominant perception among high-income countries, including Japan to this day, is that

- Protracted displacement inevitably diminishes the hopes of resuming a normal life in the original place of residence. While there are those, for the most part elderly residents, who wish to return as soon as possible, others — especially younger generations with children — have had to start rebuilding their lives elsewhere and had no plans to return. Most notably, there is an increase in those who feel that there are too many uncertainties to decide what to do. Many IDPs question whether return is a viable option, when original livelihoods have been disrupted, and communities have been geographically dispersed and socially divided due to differences in contamination levels, compensation payments and attitudes towards return.

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elderly often saw return as more desirable than younger generations, who tend to be more concerned about risks posed by remaining radiation.

- Social isolation coupled with financial hardship can easily turn into outright socio-economic marginalisation. In fact, Fukushima is the only prefecture where the number of indirect deaths resulting from health issues and suicides related to the disaster has exceeded the toll from the direct impacts of the earthquake and tsunami. Older people are particularly affected, with those above the age of 65 accounting for 90% of a total of 104 (b) (2) (c) (1) (i) (3) (5) (6).