Integrating mental health and psycho-social support in radiological or nuclear emergency planning, response, and recovery: Activities of the NEA dedicated Expert Group

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Non-radiological impacts of nuclear or radiological accident permeates both the individual and societal levels surrounding its victims. They often manifest itself in the form of mental health and psycho-social (MHPS) impairments in the former while significant and long-term socio-economic impairments in the latter. Psychological impacts of nuclear or radiological accidents became evident in Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima experiences, and well-recognized by international organizations, including UNSCEAR, ICRP, IAEA, and OECD-NEA.

Taking into consideration of non-radiological health aspects of nuclear or radiological incidents is not new; however, it is unclear as to how to operationalize the provisions for MHPS impact mitigation and to be effectively utilized for the proper decision-making throughout the entire emergency preparedness, response, and recovery cycle. In order to tackle this challenging task, the OECD-Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) working party on Nuclear Emergency Matters (WPNEM) teamed up with the World Health Organization (WHO) and established a dedicated expert group, named "EGNR" (which stands for the expert group on non-radiological public health aspects of radiation emergency planning and response). This presentation aims to introduce the EGNR and its undertakings to date and in the future.

Building on the WHO experience with mitigating mental health consequences of emergencies, the EGNR's primary goal is to develop practical tools and approaches derived from WHO's new Framework for managing MHPS impact of radiological or nuclear emergencies in order to support decision-making by emergency response planers, managers, responders and other relevant professionals. The EGNR tasks consist of: 1) contributing to the development of WHO's Framework for MHPS support in radiological and nuclear emergencies (under preparation) [1]; 2) holding a joint international workshop co-organized by BfS, OECD-NEA and WHO in Munich in March 2020 [2]; and 3) developing practical recommendations/tools/solutions for implementing the Framework based on the feedback of the workshop participants.

An all-hazards approach will be used as a basis throughout the work of the EGNR. Relevant Japanese experience related to nuclear response will be also shared.

Keywords*: Psychosocial support, emergency preparedness, practical tools*

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[2] BfS, OECD-NEA and WHO (co-organizer's). "Toward a better integration of Non-Radiological Public Health Aspects of Protection Strategies during Radiation Emergency Planning, Response and Recovery", International workshop, Munich, Germany, 18-20 March 2020.