



Labour Update

労組周辺動向 No. 229



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This bulletin contains information on law changes that have either passed, or are being discussed, in parliament, court decisions, and other labor issues in Japan that are of interest to activists.

1. Law/Policy

(1) Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to Mandate Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance - Small-Scale Businesses Also Covered - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

On October 9, a council of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) reached agreement that workers' accident compensation insurance should become mandatory for workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, where enrollment is currently voluntary. MHLW aims to submit a revised bill incorporating mandatory coverage to the regular Diet session next year.

The revision targets, in the case of agriculture, "individually operated businesses employing fewer than five workers on a regular basis." For forestry and fishery businesses, it applies to small-scale individually operated businesses. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries estimates that mandatory enrollment would affect up to 120,000 business operators.

"Specific Issues Regarding the Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance System" October 9, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 121st Meeting of the Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance Subcommittee, Labour Conditions Committee, Labour Policy Council

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11601000/001576377.pdf>

(2) LDP's Sanae Takaichi Elected Prime Minister - First Female Prime Minister in Constitutional History

Liberal Democratic Party President Sanae Takaichi (64) was elected the 104th Prime Minister in the prime ministerial designation votes in both houses of the Diet on October 21. This marks the first time a woman has assumed the position of Prime Minister in constitutional history. Nippon Ishin no Kai will not provide cabinet ministers and will limit its role to "extra-cabinet cooperation," supporting government operations based on a policy agreement.

(3) Prime Minister Requests Consideration of Labor Regulation Deregulation in Instructions to MHLW Minister

It was learned on the 21st through interviews with sources that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi requested "consideration of deregulation of working hours regulations" in her letter of instructions to Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Kenichiro Ueno. This is likely to raise concerns about impacts on work-style reform.

According to sources, the letter of instructions explicitly stated: "Review deregulation of working hours regulations on the premise of maintaining physical and mental health and employee choice," along with promoting side jobs and second jobs and accelerating minimum wage increases.

2. Legal Violations/Disputes

(1) Japan Post Issues Notice Prohibiting "Punitive Bicycles" - Bicycle Delivery Even on Extremely Hot Days

NHK's investigation revealed that in August this year, a male worker at Japan Post was ordered by his supervisor to deliver by bicycle after causing a property damage accident while delivering by motorcycle, and continued bicycle delivery duties for eight days during a series of extremely hot days.

Such orders are reportedly called "punitive bicycles" among delivery workers. While Japan Post told NHK that there was "no punitive intent," it acknowledged that there was "no operational rationality" and issued a company-wide notice prohibiting the practice.

(2) Employment Contract with Dental Hygienists Valid for On-Site Dental Examinations - Chiba District Court

In a lawsuit where five dental hygienists who were actually performing duties conducting on-site dental examinations at facilities for people with disabilities sought confirmation of worker status against the Chiba Dental Association, which had been contracted by the prefecture to carry out the program, claiming they had been effectively dismissed, the Chiba District Court recognized the employment contract as valid and ordered payment of approximately 7.8 million yen in unpaid wages.

This program was operated by the Chiba Dental Association under contract with Chiba Prefecture, whereby dentists and dental hygienists visit facilities by vehicle to conduct examinations for people with disabilities who have difficulty visiting medical institutions directly.

However, five years ago, when the program was suspended due to the spread of COVID-19 and the five dental hygienists requested government compensation for leave, they were refused on grounds that it was "a contract with no obligation to compensate," and were subsequently removed from duties. The five then filed a lawsuit seeking confirmation of worker status against the Dental Association, claiming effective dismissal.

(3) Tokai University Hospital Receives Corrective Action Order - Labor Standards Inspection Office Issues Order for Doctors' Long Working Hours and Unpaid Wages

It was learned through interviews with sources that Tokai University School of Medicine Hospital (Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture) received corrective action orders and guidance from the Labour Standards Inspection Office regarding long working hours and unpaid overtime for doctors and others. Hospital sources testified that "even when we claimed overtime pay from the hospital, we were turned away with 'there are no unpaid wages,'" and "even when we responded to emergencies during night duty, it wasn't counted as working hours. It was normal to work regular shifts the next day."

According to hospital sources, following complaints from within the hospital demanding payment of unpaid overtime, the Labour Standards Inspection Office conducted an on-site inspection in September 2023. In May 2024, the hospital received corrective action orders on 11 items including investigations regarding long working hours and unpaid overtime, and inadequate systems for reporting long-hour workers to industrial physicians, as well as guidance notices on 4 items.

A labor union official supporting the doctors pointed out that the long working hours of hospital doctors are "at a level of health concern." According to the hospital's "Physician Working Hours Reduction Plan" for fiscal 2024, based on fiscal 2022 results, doctors with over 2,000 hours of annual overtime and holiday work were present in 11 out of approximately 30 clinical departments, including clinical residents. This is more than double the karoshi (death from overwork) threshold of 960 hours annually.

3. Situation/Statistics

(1) Foreign Residents Reach Record High of 3.95 Million - First Half of Year Shows Increase of 180,000 from Year-End

The Immigration Services Agency announced on October 10 that the number of foreign

residents as of the end of June this year was 3,956,619, an increase of approximately 187,000 (5.0%) from the end of 2024, setting a new record high. By status of residence, "Specified Skilled Worker," which accepts foreign workers with immediate skills to address labor shortages, showed significant growth with an increase of approximately 51,000 (18.2%).

The largest category by status of residence was "Permanent Resident," with 932,090 people, a 1.5% increase from the end of 2024. This was followed by "Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services," who work as interpreters and in similar roles, with 458,109 people (9.4% increase), and "Technical Intern Training" with 449,432 people (1.6% decrease). Specified Skilled Worker was the fifth largest at 336,196 people. Among Specified Skilled Workers, "Category 2" holders with advanced skills numbered 3,073, a significant increase from 832 at the end of last year.

Additionally, the number of foreign entrants in the first half of 2025 was 21,376,170, approximately 3.55 million more than the same period last year.

(2) Sudden Forced Deportations, Parent-Child Separations - What Has Changed Under the "Zero Illegal Residents Plan"

In the three months since the Immigration Services Agency began its "Zero Illegal Residents Plan," forced deportations carried out at government expense with accompanying officials have doubled compared to the same period last year. Cases have occurred where children raised in Japan have been deported or parents and children have been separated. The "Zero Illegal Residents Plan" began in late May with the goal of "achieving zero illegal residents and realizing a cohesive society where people can live in peace with foreigners." It aims to reduce the number of foreigners subject to confirmed deportation orders by half by the end of 2030.

One pillar is the promotion of "escorted deportation at government expense," where officials accompany deportees. According to the Immigration Services Agency's October 10 announcement, 119 people were forcibly deported by this method from June to August. This was double the 58 people in the same period the previous year. By nationality, Turkey had the most with 34 people, followed by Sri Lanka with 17, the Philippines with 14, and China with 10.

Additionally, 36 people, or 30% of the 119 total, were in the process of applying for refugee recognition.

Of the 36 people to whom exceptions were applied, 33 fell under category ① and 3 under category ②. These reportedly included a person from the Middle East on their fifth refugee application and a person from East Asia who received a 20-year prison sentence for robbery resulting in injury.

In the one year after the revised law took effect, exceptions were applied to 25 people, indicating a significant increase after the Zero Plan began.

Since the start of the Zero Plan, Turkish nationals among Japan's Kurdish residents have been consecutively deported.

The background to the consecutive deportations of Kurdish residents includes the government's recognition that "friction with local communities has occurred in Saitama where many Kurds live, leading to public anxiety" (according to Ministry of Justice and Immigration officials). The Immigration Services Agency aims to alleviate anxiety by promoting de-

portations.

However, voices of concern about the Zero Plan have been growing.

The Japan Federation of Bar Associations criticized the plan in a May statement by its president, stating it "poses no threat whatsoever to public safety and security, has a high risk of violating the human rights of foreigners who should be protected, and violates international human rights law." It also pointed out that the plan risks perpetuating the mistaken perception that "irregular residents = a factor in worsening public safety."

The certified NPO Refugee Assistance Headquarters expressed concern in a June opinion paper about "expanded deportation of refugees requiring protection," stating that "the government is unable to properly recognize people who should be recognized as refugees."

Amnesty International Japan stated in a July open letter that the plan is "a system premised on excluding foreigners, with a strong risk of promoting discrimination."

"Implementation Status of the 'Zero Illegal Residents Plan for Public Safety and Security'"
October 10, 2025, Immigration Services Agency

<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001448366.pdf>

(3) Junior Colleges Training Nursery Teachers Cease Recruitment One After Another - Daycare Centers Say "We Can't Support Society"

Private junior colleges across the nation are consecutively suspending student recruitment, citing declining birthrates and other reasons. There is growing concern that the number of nursery teachers, who have primarily been trained at junior colleges, may decrease, and daycare centers are increasingly worried.

The suspension of recruitment at junior colleges training nursery teachers is occurring nationwide. According to the Japan Association of Private Junior Colleges, of the 23 junior colleges that have announced suspension of recruitment for 2025 and beyond, 19 schools including Shujitsu (Okayama) and Junshin (Fukuoka) are training facilities. Of the 23 junior colleges that have announced suspension of recruitment for 2026 and beyond, 18 schools including Aomori Akenohoshi and Aichi Bunkyo Women's College are training facilities.

While some junior colleges suspending recruitment are transferring their educational programs to affiliated four-year universities, they do not necessarily add the junior college's recruitment quota to the university's recruitment quota. The total enrollment capacity of designated nursery teacher training facilities decreased from a peak of 61,123 in fiscal 2018 to 52,187 in fiscal 2024. The number of facilities has also decreased from a peak of 688 in fiscal 2019 to 667 in fiscal 2024.

(4) Ordinance Establishing 50% Overtime Wage Premium Passed - Applies to 3,400 Kochi Prefecture Employees, First in Nation

An ordinance raising the overtime wage premium rate for Kochi Prefecture employees from 25% to 50% for the single year of fiscal 2026 was passed and enacted by the prefectural assembly. The prefecture states this is the first such statutory increase nationwide.

The aim is to raise awareness and create systems among managers to correct long working hours by increasing overtime pay per hour. Management will be required to prevent increases in overtime aimed at higher premium wages.

The prefecture states it aims to "raise awareness that overtime is special labor." With the declining birthrate particularly severe even by national standards, the prefecture also hopes to achieve work-life balance. It expects consciousness reform to permeate general businesses as well.

The measure applies to approximately 3,400 employees in the governor's departments. Previously, the rate was set at 25%.

(5) Wage Increases at Record High 91.5% - Base-Up at Over 50% - MHLW Survey

According to a survey on wage increases in 2025 released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare on October 14, the proportion of companies that "raised or will raise" average wages per employee was 91.5% (91.2% previous year). This represents the highest figure since 1999, when comparisons became possible. The average wage revision rate was 4.4% increase (4.1% increase previous year), also the highest. The survey confirmed the spread of wage increases against the backdrop of labor shortages and rising prices.

Average wages include regular pay increases and base-up, which raises the wage floor, but exclude overtime and bonuses. Among companies with regular raise systems, 57.8% "conducted or will conduct" base-up. However, by scale, there was a gap between 85.2% for companies with 5,000 or more employees and 53.3% for those with 100 to 299 employees.

"Overview of Survey on Actual Conditions of Wage Increases in Reiwa 7 (2025)" October 14, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/chingin/jittai/25/dl/10.pdf>

(6) Rengo Demands Wage Increase of "5% or More" - Maintains High Level, Responds to Rising Prices - Promotes Gap Correction - 2026 Spring Wage Offensive

Rengo held a Central Executive Committee meeting on October 23 and compiled a basic concept calling for wage increases of "5% or more" in the 2026 spring wage offensive. Setting an overall wage increase target of "5% or more" will be the third consecutive year since 2024. Despite concerns about adverse effects from the Trump administration's high tariff policies, Rengo maintains high-level demands to respond to rising prices and aims to establish a pattern of wage increases.

The wage increase target combines base-up, which raises basic pay, and regular pay increases, with the base-up portion set at "3% or more." To correct gaps with major companies, wage increases for small and medium-sized labor unions will be "6% or more," adding 1% or more to the overall figure, with 18,000 yen or more as a guideline in monetary terms. The policy based on the basic concept will be formally decided at the November Central Committee meeting.

According to Rengo's tabulation, the weighted average wage increase rate in the 2025

spring wage offensive achieved 5.25% overall, the highest level in 34 years. However, small and medium-sized unions with fewer than 300 members remained at 4.65%. Rengo intends to strengthen efforts to pass on increases in labor costs to prices of products and services to secure wage increase resources.