



# Labour Update

## 労組周辺動向 No. 234



2026 - 01 - 02

***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) Agreement reached to eliminate gender gap in survivors' pensions; workers' compensation insurance to be revised, agriculture, forestry and fisheries to become compulsory coverage

On December 18, the Labour Policy Council of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare reached broad agreement between labour and management on eliminating gender disparities in eligibility requirements for survivors' compensation pensions and making the workers' compensation insurance system compulsory for workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries, as part of a review of the workers' compensation insurance system.

The ministry will compile a report based on the agreement early in the new year and submit a bill to amend the law to the ordinary Diet session next year. This will be "the first wide-ranging review since the beginning of this century," according to a senior official at the ministry.

On this day, the ministry presented an "issue summary" that will form the basis of the report.

Under the current survivors' compensation pension for bereaved families of those who died from work-related injuries, wives who lose their spouses can receive the pension regardless of age, while husbands under 55 do not gain eligibility, creating a gender disparity that has been an issue. Regarding this gender gap, the issue summary stated that "it is appropriate to abolish the requirement imposed only on husbands."

Additionally, for workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries (small-scale), where the workers' compensation insurance system has been voluntary because it has been difficult to identify business operators, the summary stated that "in light of the succession of fatal accidents and other factors, it is appropriate to abolish the provisional voluntary coverage businesses and make the Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance Act compulsory coverage in stages."

"Review of the Workers' Compensation Insurance System" December 18, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 126th Labour Policy Council Labour Conditions Subcommittee Workers' Compensation Insurance Division

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11601000/001614713.pdf>

(2) Foreign worker acceptance to have upper limit of 1.23 million by end of fiscal 2028; "training and employment" replacing technical intern training expected to account for 420,000

On the morning of December 23, the government presented to an expert panel a proposal to accept a maximum total of 1,231,900 foreign workers by the end of fiscal 2028. The plan anticipates approximately 800,000 under the "specified skilled worker" residence status system and approximately 420,000 under the "training and employment" system, which will replace technical intern training starting in 2027. The government aims for a cabinet decision in late January next year based on discussions within the ruling parties.

In the upper limit proposal presented by the government, under the specified skilled worker system, which allows long-term employment, 805,700 people will be accepted in 19 fields over the three years from fiscal 2026. While the government had anticipated a maximum of 820,000 over five years from fiscal 2024, they reduced the acceptance cap by approximately 10,000 people due to productivity improvements from artificial intelligence (AI) and other factors.

The training and employment system, which will begin in April 2027, anticipates a maximum of 426,200 people in 17 fields over two years. This is the first time that the number of people to be accepted under training and employment has been indicated. The aim is to train workers to a certain skill level to alleviate domestic labour shortages and encourage transition to specified skilled worker status, which allows for longer-term work.

Regarding job transfers, which were prohibited in principle under technical intern training, they will be permitted after working for one to two years, limited to the same industry, to promote a better working environment. Technical intern training, which has seen successive cases of long working hours and unpaid wages, will be abolished.

According to the Immigration Services Agency, there were approximately 449,400 technical intern trainees as of the end of June. While simple comparisons are difficult, an agency official stated that "training and employment will be on a smaller scale than technical

intern training."

"Estimated Numbers for Specified Skilled Worker System and Training and Employment System (Draft)" December 23, 2025, Immigration Services Agency, 12th Expert Panel on Basic Policy and Field-Specific Operational Policies for Specified Skilled Worker System and Training and Employment System

<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001452589.pdf>

(3) Labour regulations, interim report expected next month; government begins discussions on deregulation

On December 24, the government held its first Regulatory Reform Promotion Council (Chairman: Tetsuro Tomita, Advisor to JR East) at the Prime Minister's Office since Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi took office. They confirmed that six areas, including labour hour deregulation which is a priority for the prime minister, will be prioritized for discussion. They aim to compile an interim report in January next year and formally decide on the report in May of the same year.

"Future Issues for Regulatory and Institutional Reform (Draft)" December 24, 2025, Cabinet Office, 26th Regulatory Reform Promotion Council

[https://www8.cao.go.jp/kisei-kaikaku/kisei/meeting/committee/251224/251224general\\_01.pdf](https://www8.cao.go.jp/kisei-kaikaku/kisei/meeting/committee/251224/251224general_01.pdf)

(4) Housing and family allowances for non-regular workers too; draft report to address wage disparities - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare council

At a subcommittee meeting held on November 25, a Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare council compiled a draft report aimed at strengthening "equal pay for equal work," which prohibits unreasonable disparities in treatment between non-regular workers such as part-time and dispatched workers and regular employees. They will promote better treatment for non-regular workers by adding housing allowance and family allowance items to the guidelines. The ministry is expected to revise the guidelines around spring next year.

The draft guideline revision illustrates problematic payment disparities in housing and family allowances, and also points out that there may be cases where disparities in retirement allowances are recognized as unreasonable. Descriptions of accident-free allowances and summer and winter holidays were also added.

Additionally, it emphasized that when converting from fixed-term to indefinite-term contracts, it is required to check in advance for unreasonable disparities in treatment and to eliminate them.

"Equal Pay for Equal Work Guidelines Review (Draft)" December 25, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 29th Labour Policy Council Employment Security Subcommittee Employment Environment and Equal Opportunity Subcommittee Equal Pay for Equal

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11901000/001620730.pdf>

(5) Fiscal 2026 budget draft decided at record high 122 trillion yen; 31 trillion yen for national debt servicing

At a cabinet meeting on December 26, the government decided on the fiscal 2026 budget draft. The general account total is 122 trillion 309.2 billion yen, exceeding the previous year's initial budget by over 7 trillion yen. Expenditures expanded as price increases were reflected in each expense category. This marks the second consecutive year of record highs. Social security-related expenses, including medical care and nursing care, are the largest at 39 trillion 55.9 billion yen.

National debt servicing costs for debt repayment and interest payments amounted to 31 trillion 275.8 billion yen. This exceeded the 28 trillion 217.9 billion yen in the fiscal 2025 initial budget, which was the previous record. The assumed interest rate used for calculating national debt interest payments will be raised to 3.0%.

(6) Labour Standards Act amendment, "not considering" submitting to next ordinary Diet session - Minister Ueno

At a press conference after a cabinet meeting on December 26, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Kenichiro Ueno stated regarding amendments to the Labour Standards Act, including a review of work style reform, "We are not currently considering submitting a bill to the (next) ordinary Diet session."

The ministry had initially considered submitting an amended Labour Standards Act bill to the next ordinary Diet session. However, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi issued an instruction to "consider deregulation of labour hour restrictions," and work style reform will also be discussed at a subcommittee of the Japan Growth Strategy Council, so the ministry decided to determine the timing of submission based on those discussions.

(7) "Regarding Proper Operation of the Fiscal Year Appointment Non-permanent Staff System (Notice)" December 25, 2025, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

[https://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_content/001048563.pdf](https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/001048563.pdf)

## **2. Legal Violations/Disputes**

(1) Supermarket "Ropia" had suppliers dispatch workers without compensation; to pay over 400 million yen

Food supermarket "Ropia" (Kawasaki City), which had supplier employees dispatched to its stores without compensation, was investigated by the Japan Fair Trade Commission on

suspicion of violating the Antimonopoly Act (abuse of superior bargaining position) and submitted an improvement and recurrence prevention plan. The Fair Trade Commission recognized the effectiveness of the plan and announced it on December 25.

Over a period of approximately 2 years and 10 months, Ropia had more than 10,000 people dispatched from approximately 400 supplier companies, but did not bear any of the total costs of approximately 433 million yen for personnel expenses, transportation expenses, accommodation expenses, etc. The plan is to pay the full amount.

According to the Fair Trade Commission, from at least September 2022 to around June 2025, Ropia had supplier employees dispatched without compensation to arrange merchandise at newly opening stores and to stock sale items and other merchandise. There were also cases where employees handled tasks for other companies' products or where suppliers used temporary staffing agencies.

Dispatch requests were made by buyers who had discretion over product shelf allocation and other matters. In addition to directly requesting suppliers who had not agreed to the conditions, they also requested cooperation from major food wholesalers and manufacturers to gather employees who could be dispatched from their business partners. In all cases, it was virtually impossible to refuse the requests against the background of Ropia's strong position.

### **3. Situation/Statistics**

#### (1) Over one-third of companies allow work until age 70; continued employment and other systems introduced - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

According to the 2025 Employment Status Report of Older Persons announced by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare on December 19, the percentage of companies where people can work until age 70 increased 2.9 percentage points from the previous year to 34.8%, exceeding one-third of all companies. The number of companies introducing continued employment systems increased. The Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons makes ensuring employment opportunities until age 70 an effort obligation for business operators.

Ensuring opportunities until age 65 became mandatory from this fiscal year, and 99.9% of companies have implemented it.

"Publication of Aggregate Results of the 2025 'Employment Status Report of Older Persons'" December 19, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11700000/001609988.pdf>

"Supplementary Tables" December 19, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11703000/001609919.pdf>

#### (2) One in three teachers underreports working hours, teachers' union survey

December 19, 2025

<https://news.web.nhk/newsweb/na/na-k10015008481000>

Amid the serious issue of long working hours for teachers, a survey of over 10,000 people conducted by a teachers' union found that one in three underreport their working hours.

The survey was conducted by the Japan Teachers' Union annually among teaching staff at public schools nationwide, and this time received responses from 17,683 people.

When asked about work practices over the past year, a combined 33.2% responded that they "always record shorter hours" or "have recorded shorter hours," revealing that one in three underreported their working hours.

When asked for reasons with multiple responses allowed:

▽ "Meeting with a doctor is troublesome" at 36.9%

▽ "Pointed out by management" at 36%

▽ "Colleagues also record shorter hours" at 21.6%

Additionally:

▽ "Taking work home" was 57.6%

▽ Weekend overtime work was 40.3%

(3) "Overview of the 2025 Comprehensive Survey of Working Conditions" December 19, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/jikan/syurou/25/dl/gaikyou.pdf>

"Publication of Results of the 2025 'Comprehensive Survey of Working Conditions'" December 19, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/jikan/syurou/25/dl/houdou.pdf>

(4) Mie Prefecture considers discontinuing hiring of prefectural employees with foreign nationality from next fiscal year

Mie Prefecture has begun considering discontinuing the hiring of prefectural employees with foreign nationality, which has been conducted since fiscal 1999, possibly starting from next fiscal year, due to concerns that highly confidential personal information may not be protected, according to interviews with related parties. The prefecture plans to formally decide after conducting a survey of approximately 10,000 prefectural residents starting next month.

Since fiscal 1999, Mie Prefecture has abolished nationality requirements in prefectural employee recruitment examinations for some job categories to promote social participation of foreigners, allowing people with foreign nationality to take examinations for positions other than those exercising public authority such as tax collection or participating in the formation of public will as managers.

It has been learned from interviews with related parties that Mie Prefecture is reviewing these hiring requirements and has begun considering discontinuing the hiring of prefectur-

al employees with foreign nationality, possibly starting from next fiscal year. Since fiscal 2005, when records can be confirmed, Mie Prefecture has hired 9 prefectural employees with foreign nationality, mainly in specialized positions such as doctors and nurses. Currently one person is employed, and the prefecture will continue their employment even after revising the hiring requirements.

Starting next month, Mie Prefecture plans to conduct a survey of approximately 10,000 prefectural residents on whether to continue hiring employees with foreign nationality before formally deciding.

#### (5) Hiring of foreign nationals "will not change" - Shiga Governor announces maintaining abolition of nationality requirements

Regarding Mie Prefecture's consideration of reviewing the hiring of employees with foreign nationality, Shiga Governor Taizo Mikazuki stated at a regular press conference on December 26 that "we don't need to change that method," making clear the policy to continue hiring employees with foreign nationality, where nationality requirements have been abolished.

The prefecture has abolished nationality requirements for all job categories in the governor's departments in recruitment examinations since fiscal 2000, and currently 5 people with foreign nationality are employed. However, they cannot engage in work involving the exercise of public authority such as tax collection, and cannot hold managerial positions at the Sanjiyaku level or higher, which are involved in planning prefectural administration.

Governor Mikazuki stated, "I think it's good to have various people, including those with different nationalities, enter the prefecture and work for us." While the Mie Governor is concerned about the leakage of highly confidential personal information, Governor Mikazuki expressed the view that "regardless of nationality, everyone works based on the law in the same way."

#### (6) Labour union organization rate estimated at 16.0%, lowest ever for fourth consecutive year - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare survey

The labour union organization rate is estimated at 16.0% as of June this year, marking the lowest ever for the fourth consecutive year, according to a Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare survey.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, as of the end of June this year, there were just over 22,000 labour unions with 9,927,000 union members.

The number of union members increased by 15,000 compared to the same period the previous year, but the organization rate, which indicates the proportion of people who join labour unions, is estimated at 16.0%, down 0.1 percentage points from the previous year, marking the lowest ever for the fourth consecutive year.

Of these, part-time union members totaled 1,494,000, accounting for 15.1% of all union members, an increase of 31,000 from the previous year and a record high.

Additionally, the number of members in major organizations, including those who join local organizations directly, was 6,924,000 for "Rengo," an increase of 7,000 from the previous year, 649,000 for "Zenroren," a decrease of 19,000, and 77,000 for "Zenrokyo," a decrease of 5,000.

The organization rate, which was in the 30% range until the early 1980s, has continued to decline.

"Overview of the 2025 Basic Survey on Labour Unions" December 24, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/roushi/kiso/25/dl/gaikyou.pdf>

"Publication of Results of the 2025 'Basic Survey on Labour Unions'" December 24, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/roushi/kiso/25/dl/houdou.pdf>

(7) Food price increases in 2025 exceed 20,000 items; confectionery up maximum 18% due to soaring cocoa beans

Teikoku Databank announced on December 26 survey results showing that food price increases in 2025 totaled 20,609 items, approximately 60% more than the previous year's actual figure. Rising raw material costs and personnel expenses were the main factors, with the burden on household budgets becoming clear.

By item category in 2025, "seasonings," which saw few price increases the previous year, was the highest at 6,221 items. "Alcoholic beverages/drinks," affected by soaring coffee beans, followed with 4,901 items, and "processed foods," including packaged rice, had 4,791 items.

The average price increase rate was 15%, down from 17% the previous year. The highest was "confectionery" and "alcoholic beverages/drinks," where chocolate prices rose due to soaring cocoa beans, both at 18%.

"20,609 Food and Beverage Price Increases in 2025: A Year of 'Normalized' Price Increases" December 26, 2025, Teikoku Databank

<https://bit.ly/4pZm2CV>

(8) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology survey on researchers' "non-renewal of contract": 10% of contracts terminated just before the 10-year limit for fixed-term employment

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology announced the results of this year's fact-finding survey on the issue of successive "non-renewal of contract" for researchers employed on fixed-term contracts at universities and research institutions. Approximately 10% of people whose contracts were terminated for reasons other than retirement just before they could convert to indefinite-term employment, suggesting that non-renewal of contracts continues.

Researchers on fixed-term contracts are stipulated by a special provision of the Labour Contract Act and other laws to be able to request conversion to indefinite-term employment until retirement if their employment period exceeds a total of 10 years. This is in-

tended to ensure employment stability, but it has been pointed out that in reality, non-renewal of contracts occurs just before 10 years.

The survey confirmed the situation as of May 1, 2025, targeting all 861 institutions including universities, and 758 institutions (88%) responded.

As a result, of the 6,903 people subject to the special provision where fixed-term employment exceeds a total of 10 years, 710 people (10%) had their contracts terminated for reasons other than mandatory retirement. Of these, 486 people (7%) in total had undecided next employment or unknown status, and are believed to include people whose contracts were not renewed. Furthermore, 5,355 people (78%) continued fixed-term contracts, and 598 people (9%) transitioned to indefinite-term contracts.

On the other hand, by law, if there is a gap of 6 months or more in the contract, the total period is reset and it becomes impossible to request conversion to indefinite-term employment. The practice of "cooling-off," where research institutions promise re-employment to researchers while creating gap periods to avoid indefinite-term employment, has been criticized.

On December 26, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology issued a notice to universities nationwide calling attention to this issue, stating that "cooling-off is not desirable for ensuring employment stability."

"Regarding Appropriate Response to Employment of Researchers and Teachers (Request)"  
December 26, 2025, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

[https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20251224-mxt\\_kiban03-000046515\\_002.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20251224-mxt_kiban03-000046515_002.pdf)

"Survey Report on 'Survey on Employment Status of Researchers and Teachers'"  
December 26, 2025, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

[https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20251224-mxt\\_kiban03-000046515\\_001.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20251224-mxt_kiban03-000046515_001.pdf)