



Labour Update

労組周辺動向 No. 239



2026 - 03 - 13

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) Employers with unpaid wages for "Specified Skilled Worker" visa holders also barred from "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" visa - Dispatch site inspections to be strengthened

It has come to light that the Immigration Services Agency of Japan has decided on a policy to deny acceptance under the "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" (Gijin-Koku) residence status to employers who have had problems such as unpaid wages under other statuses such as "Specified Skilled Worker." The agency plans to revise its guidelines as early as April. Regarding the Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services status, concerns have been raised about unauthorized activities involving simple labor at dispatch worksites, and the agency will also strengthen on-site inspections of dispatch destinations.

In addition, when foreign nationals work in a dispatch arrangement, the agency will require dispatch agencies and client companies to thoroughly submit employment contracts and management ledgers recording actual working days and hours. Applications will not

be accepted if the dispatch destination has not been confirmed.

In the new basic policy on foreign national policy decided by the government on January 23, four residence statuses were identified as requiring rectification: Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services, the "Business Manager" status for entrepreneurs, "Student," and "Permanent Resident." Of these, the Business Manager status was tightened in October last year, with the required capital raised from 5 million yen to 30 million yen or more. Reviews of the other statuses are also underway.

(2) Residence permit fees to rise, Immigration Control Act revision planned - Ministry of Finance's intentions and anxiety among foreign residents in Japan

A bill to amend the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, including a significant increase in residence examination fees, was approved by the Cabinet on March 10. The fee for renewal or change of residence status is set to rise sharply from the current 6,000 yen to approximately 70,000 yen, and the fee for permanent residence permission from 10,000 yen to approximately 200,000 yen. Behind this move is the Ministry of Finance's aim to secure revenue amid the rapid increase in the number of foreign residents in Japan.

The key pillars of the bill are the increase in residence examination fees and the creation from fiscal year 2028 of the "Japan Electronic Travel Authorization" (JESTA) system, which will screen foreign nationals' eligibility to enter Japan in advance. The government aims to pass the bill in a special session of the Diet.

Against the backdrop of rising prices, the government and ruling coalition have been rolling out a series of measures to reduce the burden on citizens, while securing revenue through tax increases has become increasingly difficult. In this context, the Ministry of Finance, exploiting an atmosphere of exclusionism, set its sights on raising residence permit fees - with a senior official stating that "it would be easier to increase the burden on foreign nationals."

If the additional revenue from the fee increases exceeds the budget increase for foreign national-related policies, the surplus funds could be redirected to other programs. The Ministry of Finance has indicated that in fiscal year 2026, approximately 40% (around 93 billion yen) of the additional revenue from three fee increases related to foreign nationals will effectively be used as a partial source of funding for free education policies and the abolition of the old provisional gasoline tax rate.

Residence permit fees were already raised last year within the existing statutory cap of 10,000 yen. The continued increases are spreading anxiety among foreign resident communities in Japan.

"Bill to Partially Amend the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the Act on Special Cases of Landing Applications for Foreign Nationals Holding Passports as Referred to in Article 2, Item 5(b) of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act" - Cabinet Decision, March 10, 2026

<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001457911.pdf>

2. Legal Violations/Disputes

(1) JA Okinawa employee's cerebral hemorrhage recognized as work-related injury caused by long working hours

It has come to light that a JA Okinawa employee who suffered a cerebral hemorrhage due to long working hours received workers' compensation recognition last month.

The employee who received workers' compensation recognition is Hiroki Uehara (38), a JA Okinawa staff member who was working as a site supervisor at a mango sorting facility in Tomigusuku City.

According to the employee's attorney, Uehara and a colleague had repeatedly appealed to management about understaffing at the mango sorting facility, but no improvements were made. He is considering filing a damages lawsuit against JA Okinawa on the grounds that it violated its duty of care to ensure safe working conditions.

(2) Settlement reached in lawsuit over "involuntary transfer leading to leave and dismissal" - dismissal reversed and 20 million yen settlement payment

An appeals court settlement was reached at the Osaka High Court by March 3 in a lawsuit filed by a male employee of the Shiga Prefecture Social Welfare Council who sought confirmation of his employment status, claiming he was forced onto leave and subsequently dismissed due to a transfer made without his consent. The settlement is dated February 25. According to the plaintiff's attorney, the Council will reverse the dismissal and pay 20 million yen as a settlement - equivalent to the salary that would have been paid had the dismissal not occurred.

In a separate lawsuit filed by the man challenging the invalidity of the transfer, the Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in April 2024, holding that where there is a labor-management agreement limiting job type, an employer does not have the authority to order a transfer without the employee's consent.

(3) Curfew violations punished with written apologies - technical intern trainees at Makurazaki bonito flake factory claim "appalling" working conditions - approximately 1.4 million yen in damages ordered against union and company

In a lawsuit filed by four foreign technical intern trainees who worked at a bonito flake factory in Makurazaku City claiming they were subjected to unjust treatment and seeking damages from their accepting organization and others, the Kagoshima District Court on March 3 issued a judgment partially upholding the claims and ordering compensation.

In the March 3 ruling, the Kagoshima District Court found that the trainees' sleeping quarters were partitioned only by curtains and fell below the government-mandated area of 4.5 square meters per person, and that requiring trainees to write letters of apology in Japanese when they broke curfew constituted an unlawful restriction on their freedom.

The court ordered the accepting union and company to pay each trainee between 100,000 and 150,000 yen in consolation money for the unlawful restrictions imposed on them.

(4) Hyogo Sanda City Hospital: 83 million yen in unpaid overtime - 41 section-chief-level

employees to be paid in installments

It has come to light that Sanda City Hospital (Sanda City) was cited by the Itami Labor Standards Inspection Office for failing to pay overtime to section-chief-level employees. The corrective guidance order is dated September 9, 2025. The hospital subsequently determined that a total of 41 employees, including deputy director-level staff, had not been paid. A total of 83 million yen will be paid in installments.

The Labor Standards Act provides that "supervisors and managers" who receive appropriate treatment in terms of salary and other benefits are exempt from overtime pay. However, after receiving complaints from section-chief-level employees at the hospital, the Labor Standards Inspection Office conducted an investigation and found that their actual working conditions did not meet the criteria for supervisors and managers, and instructed the hospital to make improvements.

In 2022, the hospital was also cited for failing to pay overtime to doctors, nurses, and medical technicians, resulting in payments of approximately 257 million yen to around 330 employees.

(5) Over 100 after-school childcare workers refuse transfer to private company - "Different from what was promised" as allowances and benefits reduced

Workers at after-school childcare clubs (gakudo hoiku) in Fujimi City, Saitama Prefecture are refusing to transfer to the private company that will operate the clubs from April, making a smooth transition uncertain. The workers are objecting to cuts in their working conditions, and as of March 4, there is no prospect of resolution.

The employment conditions shown by the city when soliciting applications stated that current treatment would be "considered so as not to fall below" existing levels, and the union side is strongly protesting that "this is different from what was promised."

(6) Fukuoka court upholds claim of two re-employed teachers at Sugimori High School over "unjust reduction from five to three working days per week" - orders payment of salary difference

On March 9, the Yanagawa Branch of the Fukuoka District Court issued a judgment in a lawsuit filed by two re-employed teachers in their 60s at the private Sugimori High School in Yanagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture, who sought confirmation of their employment status, claiming it was unjust to have their working schedule changed from five days a week to three. The judgment upheld the two employees' status claims and ordered the operating corporation to pay the difference in salary.

(7) Tokyo District Court recognizes depression of former Coca-Cola Japan division head as work-related injury

In a lawsuit filed by a former division head in his 60s at Coca-Cola Japan who sought work-injury recognition after developing depression due to repeated pressure to resign, the Tokyo District Court ruled that "the company repeatedly pressured the plaintiff to resign in an intimidating and persistent manner" and upheld the claim.

The man, who was a division head at Coca-Cola Japan in 2019 at age 62, was suspected of compliance violations; while no clear violations were found in the investigation, he was repeatedly urged to resign on grounds of inadequate performance, and upon returning to his workplace was subjected to a job transfer, among other measures.

The former division head developed depression the following year and sought workers' compensation recognition on the grounds that the repeated pressure to resign and other actions were the cause, but was denied by the Shibuya Labor Standards Inspection Office. After leaving the company, he filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn the government's decision.

The court ruled that the depression was caused by work-related factors, recognized it as a work-related injury, and overturned the government's decision as unlawful.

(8) Lawsuit over collective bargaining between a company and a union in Ginan-cho, Gifu Prefecture - both sides present their arguments

A lawsuit has been filed in the Gifu District Court in which both a company located in Ginan-cho, Gifu Prefecture, and a labor union are each alleging illegality and seeking damages in connection with collective bargaining between them.

The company claims that the union's confrontational attitude during negotiations caused the company president mental distress, while the union argues that the company's lawsuit is intended to suppress union activities.

3. Situation/Statistics

(1) Discussions begin on correcting delayed effective dates for minimum wage - excessive competition between neighboring prefectures to be curbed

On February 27, the Central Minimum Wage Council (an advisory body to the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare), which sets the guidelines for minimum wages, decided to begin deliberations on corrective measures following a series of delayed "effective dates" in the fiscal year 2025 revisions.

Delaying the effective date means that workers receive the increased wages later than intended. Some have argued that this undermines the credibility of the Minimum Wage Act's goal of "ensuring stability of livelihood," and the council will consider how to curb the excessive competition among neighboring prefectures to raise wages that leads to such delays.

(2) Over 90% of companies utilizing foreign workers - challenges also identified [Survey of 100 companies]

A survey of 100 major domestic companies on the utilization of foreign workers found that companies responding "actively accepting" or "partially accepting" combined to exceed 90%. As Japan's population continues to decline, more companies are turning to foreign workers to secure personnel with specialized skills.

NHK conducted a survey of 100 major domestic companies from December last year

through January this year. When asked about the utilization of foreign workers, of the 78 companies that responded:

- "Actively accepting and utilizing" accounted for 38%
- "Partially accepting and utilizing" accounted for 54%

indicating that over 90% of companies are moving forward with accepting foreign workers.

When asked about the reasons (multiple responses allowed):

- "Securing specialized skills and technology" was the most common at 63%
- "Promoting innovation through diversity" was 62%
- "Strengthening global business development" was 49%
- "Addressing labor shortages" was 31%

When asked about future policy (multiple responses allowed):

- "Maintain current situation" was 26%
- "Actively expand hiring" was 23%
- "Strengthen hiring in specific fields" was 22%
- "Expand local hiring for overseas business development" was 10%

When asked about challenges in accepting foreign workers (multiple responses allowed):

- "Enhancing Japanese language education and training systems" was 51%
- "Simplifying and expediting visa and residence status acquisition" was 38%
- "Developing career paths for foreign workers" was 33%
- "Supporting the daily lives of foreign workers" was 29%

highlighting a range of challenges.

(3) Welfare assistance applications increase for sixth consecutive year in 2025

According to Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare statistics released on March 4, welfare assistance applications from January through December 2025 totaled 256,438, a 0.2% increase over the previous year, marking the sixth consecutive year of increase. This is the highest figure since comparable data became available in 2013.

"Releasing the Results of the Survey on Welfare Assistance Recipients (Confirmed Figures for Fiscal Year Reiwa 6)" - March 4, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/hihogosya/m2025/dl/r06houdou.pdf>

(4) Only 10.5% want to increase working hours - Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare releases comprehensive work style reform review

In a survey on working hours conducted as part of a comprehensive review of work style reform, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare found that 10.5% of respondents said they wanted to increase their working hours. Additionally, 0.5% said they wanted to increase overtime beyond the cap of an average of 80 hours per month over multiple months.

The Liberal Democratic Party, under the view that "people who want to work are unable to do so due to the cap on overtime," included a "work-how-you-want reform" in its platform for last summer's House of Councillors election. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi also in-

structed a review of working hour regulations upon taking office. However, 59.5% of respondents said their current working hours are "fine as they are."

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare released the results on March 5. The survey, aimed at understanding actual working conditions and needs regarding the work style reform that introduced overtime caps, was conducted in October last year among 3,000 workers.

Regarding working hours: 10.5% said they want to increase, 59.5% said they are "fine as they are," and 30% said they want to reduce.

"Comprehensive Review Five Years After the Enforcement of the Work Style Reform-Related Legislation (Summary of Results)" - March 5, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/001666752.pdf>

(5) Teacher shortage of 4,317 nationwide - affecting 2,828 schools, or 8% of all public schools

A survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology released on March 5 found that as of the start of the 2025 academic year, 2,828 public elementary, junior high, and high schools and special needs schools across the country - equivalent to 8.8% of all such schools - were unable to staff 4,317 teaching positions as originally planned. This is a deterioration from the 2,558 teachers and 5.8% figure recorded in the previous survey conducted in fiscal year 2021. The ongoing reality of teacher shortages - caused by the inability to fill vacancies left by those on maternity/childcare leave or sick leave - has once again been highlighted.

Nine education boards, including those in Tokyo and Kochi Prefecture, reported zero shortages, while the proportion of schools experiencing shortages exceeded 30% in Shimane Prefecture, Fukuoka Prefecture, and Kumamoto City, revealing significant regional disparities. Conditions improved compared to the previous survey in 23 education boards, while 41 boards saw deterioration.

(6) ILO warns of risk that AI will widen gender gap in the workplace

Clerical and other occupations with a high proportion of women are more vulnerable to the effects of generative artificial intelligence (AI). The International Labour Organization (ILO) issued a report ahead of International Women's Day on March 8, warning of the risk that the rapid development of generative AI could widen gender disparities in the labor market.

The report, dated March 5, compared the impact of AI on female-dominated occupations such as secretarial and receptionist roles with male-dominated occupations such as those in the construction sector. Female-dominated occupations were found to be more susceptible to having parts of their work replaced by AI, with 29% projected to be affected, compared to only 16% for male-dominated occupations.

The report also noted that women account for only 30% of those working in the AI industry. It warned that if few women are involved in AI development, there is a risk that prod-

ucts will be developed without adequate consideration of gender equality.

"New ILO data confirm women face higher workplace risks from generative AI than men"
- 5 March 2026, International Labour Organization

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/new-ilo-data-confirm-women-face-higher-workplace-risks-generative-ai-men>

(7) Gender wage gap more pronounced at large companies - differences in tenure and promotion

It has become clear as of March 8 that the gap in monthly wages between men and women tends to widen as company size increases. At large companies, a gap of tens of thousands of yen among younger employees widens to nearly 200,000 yen among veteran employees, reflecting the larger salary increases that accompany longer tenure and promotion. March 8 is International Women's Day. To close the gap, there are calls to create an environment where women can continue working and advance their careers, including by promoting men's uptake of childcare leave.

Kyodo News analyzed average monthly wages for full-time workers based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's 2024 Basic Survey on Wage Structure, comparing large companies with 1,000 or more employees and small companies with 10 to 99 employees. At large companies, men's average monthly wage across all age groups was 403,400 yen and women's was 296,600 yen. The female-to-male index, with men set at 100, was 73.5. At small companies, men averaged 324,500 yen and women 255,500 yen, giving an index of 78.7. Small companies have consistently shown a smaller gap than large companies since comparable data became available in 2006.

Average tenure at large companies is 15.3 years for men and 10.4 years for women - a difference of nearly five years.

(8) Real wages in January up 1.4% - first increase in 13 months, driven by wage growth and slower price rises

According to the Monthly Labour Survey (preliminary figures, establishments with five or more employees) released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare on March 9, real wages - nominal wages adjusted for price changes - rose 1.4% year-on-year in January, turning positive for the first time in 13 months. The increase was driven by strong growth in scheduled wages, combined with a slowdown in the pace of price increases.

"Monthly Labour Survey - Preliminary Results for January 2026 (Reiwa 8)" - March 9, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/monthly/r08/2601p/dl/pdf2601p.pdf>

(9) Only 60% of junior high school teachers have monthly overtime of 45 hours or less - Ministry of Education survey

In public junior high schools, only 60.5% of teachers had monthly overtime of 45 hours or less in fiscal year 2024. The figures for elementary schools and high schools were 77.8% and 72.6%, respectively.

While all figures showed improvement over the previous year, the government's target of 100% working 45 hours or less per month remains far from being achieved.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology released the results of its survey of education boards and other bodies nationwide on March 9.

"Survey on the Status of Efforts by Education Boards to Promote Work Style Reform in Schools - Fiscal Year Reiwa 6 [Summary of Results]" - March 9, 2026, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250324-mxt_zaimu-000041069.pdf