



Labour Update

労組周辺動向 No. 241



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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) Supporting Work-Treatment Balance: Corporate Support Becomes Obligatory Effort from April 1

With advances in medical technology, more people are working while undergoing medical treatment. From April 1, companies are now required to make efforts to support employees in balancing treatment with work, so they can continue without resigning.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, as of four years ago, 23.26 million people were working while attending medical appointments, accounting for 40.6% of the entire workforce.

This trend is driven by advances in medical technology and an increase in older workers, and the number of people working while undergoing treatment is expected to continue to grow.

Accordingly, from April 1, corporate support has become an obligatory effort to ensure all workers can continue working with peace of mind.

"Guidelines for Supporting the Balance Between Treatment and Work (Overview)" April 1, 2026 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11200000/001666823.pdf>

(2) Safety Consideration for Sole Proprietors and Freelancers Made Mandatory; Consideration for Workers Aged 60 and Over Becomes Obligatory Effort... Amended Industrial Safety and Health Act Partially Enforced from April

From April 1, certain provisions of the amended Industrial Safety and Health Act came into force, adding individual business operators - including sole proprietors and freelancers - to the scope of safety and health considerations and disaster prevention measures that businesses and others are required to implement.

In addition, it has become an obligatory effort for all businesses to take necessary measures that accommodate the characteristics of workers aged 60 and over.

Furthermore, a partial amendment to the related Act for Promoting Comprehensive Employment Policies also came into force, newly designating as an obligatory effort for businesses to establish support systems enabling employees with illnesses such as cancer to balance treatment and work.

Under this revision, in mixed worksites (sites where multiple businesses or workers in different employment arrangements work together), the scope of "guidance, coordination, and related measures" that prime contractors (principal contractors) and others are required to implement has been expanded from "workers" to "workers and other persons engaged in work (including individual business operators, etc.)."

(3) Japanese Language Proficiency Requirement Added for "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" Residence Status

It became known on the 3rd through interviews with government officials that the government has decided, in principle, to require proof of Japanese language proficiency for those taking up roles involving the use of Japanese, as a condition for obtaining the "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" residence status for professions utilizing specialized knowledge. Cases in which holders of the "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" status were engaged in simple labor - which is originally prohibited - had been a problem. Guidelines are expected to be revised as early as mid-April to tighten screening.

The measure targets those newly arriving in Japan who apply for "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" for the purpose of taking up roles involving the use of Japanese. International students and others seeking to change their residence status to "Engineer / Specialist in Humanities / International Services" are excluded.

2. Legal Violations/Disputes

(1) Demotion of Male Store Manager Who Took Paternity Leave Twice Ruled "Illegal"; Court Orders Damages Against au Dealer

On March 27, the Tsu District Court issued a ruling in a lawsuit brought by a male store manager in his 30s who had worked at a mobile phone shop in Mie Prefecture. He was demoted after taking parental leave and was never reinstated to the store manager position. Judge Takahiro Ogawa ruled that the demotion was unlawful under the Act on Childcare Leave, Caregiver Leave, and Other Measures for the Welfare of Workers Caring for Children or Other Family Members, which prohibits adverse treatment on the grounds of parental leave, and ordered the company - au sales dealer "Crops" (headquartered in Nagoya) - to pay approximately 1.5 million yen in damages and other compensation.

(2) Osaka District Court Overturns Disciplinary Action for Union Activity During Work Hours; "Allowing Violations to Accumulate Before Punishing" Ruled "Illegal"

In a lawsuit brought by two former employees of Kadoma City, Osaka Prefecture, who contested disciplinary actions - pay cuts and reprimands - imposed on them for repeatedly leaving their posts for union activities, the Osaka District Court ruled on March 30 to overturn both disciplinary actions. The court found it "illegal" that "(the city) waited for the misconduct to accumulate without issuing any particular warnings before imposing punishment."

(3) Bus Drivers Sue Osaka Metro; Disparities in Treatment Compared to Re-employed Staff

On March 30, 19 people hired as drivers and others for the on-demand bus service operated by Osaka Metro filed suit in the Osaka District Court, seeking approximately 18 million yen in unpaid wage differences from the company. They alleged unjustified disparities in bonuses and other benefits compared to employees re-hired after mandatory retirement who perform the same duties. They also claimed that working conditions were not disclosed to them prior to employment.

According to the complaint, the plaintiffs were seconded to a subcontracted company after being hired between March 2024 and June 2025. During job interviews, they understood they would receive treatment equivalent to Osaka Metro employees except for the absence of pay raises and retirement benefits. However, while the plaintiffs received a fixed bonus amount, Osaka Metro's re-employed staff received performance-linked bonuses and crew allowances, among others.

(4) Wage Disparity for Non-regular Employment Results in Damages Order; Amami City Development Corporation in Kagoshima

In a lawsuit brought by a man who had been on fixed-term employment at the Amami City Development Corporation - wholly owned by Amami City, Kagoshima Prefecture - over his failure to receive commuting allowances and bonuses paid to permanent employees, the Naze Branch of the Kagoshima District Court ruled on March 31 that the disparity constituted an unreasonable difference in working conditions, ordering the corporation to pay approximately 5.9 million yen in damages.

Judge Tomonori Yoshioka stated in his reasoning that commuting costs do not change de-

pending on whether employment is fixed-term or permanent, making the difference in commuting allowance amounts unreasonable. He also found it "unreasonable" not to pay bonuses to fixed-term employees.

(5) Are Night Duty Shifts Work? Government Loses Case After Denying It; Warning Against "Unlimited Work"

The Tokyo District Court ruled in favor of a male doctor in his 50s from the Hospital of the Institute of Medical Science, the University of Tokyo (Minato Ward, Tokyo), who had been bedridden following a subarachnoid hemorrhage and sought recognition of his condition as an occupational accident caused by overwork. Although the doctor had been assigned to night duty shifts, labor standards inspection offices and labor bureau examiners had partially or fully excluded night duty hours from the working time calculation - on the grounds that he was "able to sleep" - and denied the occupational accident claim.

The ruling recognized that "he was under the command and control of the hospital during night duty shifts and could not be said to have been guaranteed freedom from work," and classified night duty hours as "working time used to evaluate the burden of duties." The ruling was dated March 16. The government did not appeal, and the ruling is now final.

(6) Refusal to Continue Employment Due to Union Membership Found "Unjust"; Tokyo Labor Relations Commission Orders Private High School Foundation to Reinstate Teacher

On March 30, the Tokyo Metropolitan Labor Relations Commission ruled that the refusal to continue the employment of a teacher at Felicia Private High School (Machida, Tokyo) constituted an unfair labor practice based on the teacher's union membership. The commission ordered the school's operating foundation, "Meisen Gakuen," to reinstate the teacher and pay an amount equivalent to wages retroactive to the date of retirement.

According to the order, the teacher had been active as a union member of the school's staff union and others, and reached the mandatory retirement age of 60 in June 2022. The school's employment rules stipulated that employment of staff would be continued until age 65 unless they failed to meet criteria established by the foundation, but the school refused to continue employment citing a record of numerous disciplinary actions.

(7) Hama-Sushi Issued Corrective Guidance; Unpaid Wages Due to "15-Minute Unit" Calculation for Late Arrivals; Three Years of Back Pay to Be Settled

It came to light that Hama-Sushi, a major revolving sushi chain, had received corrective guidance from the Gyoda Labor Standards Inspection Office for unpaid wages at its outlets. The guidance was issued in December 2025. An employee affiliated with the Revolving Sushi Union had filed a complaint with the labor standards office. Hama-Sushi has indicated it will review and pay unpaid wages going back three years.

(8) Toyo University Found to Have Unpaid Overtime: Possibly Over 20 Years, Approximately 18 Million Yen Annually; Labor Standards Office Issues Corrective Guidance

It came to light that Toyo University (Tokyo) received corrective guidance from the Oji La-

bor Standards Inspection Office last October for violations of the Labour Standards Act, due to partial non-payment of overtime wages to faculty and staff. While the university acknowledges the underpayment, it states that the number of people affected and the total amount are "still being reviewed." According to university sources, the underpayment had continued for over 20 years, with annual unpaid amounts estimated at approximately 18 million yen.

According to Toyo University and related sources, when calculating the "monthly salary" used as the basis for computing overtime pay for faculty and staff, housing allowances - which should have been included - were mistakenly excluded, resulting in partial non-payment of overtime wages. Those affected include university staff as well as faculty and staff at affiliated junior high schools, high schools, and retired employees.

(9) Former Fixed-Term Employee at Asahikawa Central Post Office Files Suit Against Japan Post After Sexual Harassment and Non-Renewal of Contract

On April 6, a woman who had been a fixed-term employee filed suit in the Asahikawa District Court against Japan Post and others, seeking 4 million yen in damages and confirmation of her status as an employee. She alleged that after suffering sexual harassment by a male colleague at the post office in Asahikawa, Hokkaido, and recovering under medical care with clearance from her doctor to return to work, her contract was unjustly not renewed.

According to the complaint, the woman, who had been working at Asahikawa Central Post Office, was persistently approached and physically touched on multiple occasions during work hours by a male colleague between autumn 2024 and February of last year. She reported the matter through an internal channel, and part of it was recognized as harassment.

(10) Suicide of Saku City Employee in Nagano Recognized as "Occupational Accident" Due to Overwork

It became known that the suicide of a male municipal employee in Saku City, Nagano Prefecture, who was 51 years old at the time and died four years ago, has been recognized as a "job-related accident" (occupational accident in the public sector, equivalent to workers' accident compensation in the private sector) attributable to overwork.

The recognition was granted to Noboru Koganezawa (age 51 at the time), who had worked in the Civil Engineering Section of the Construction Department of Saku City Hall and died by suicide four years ago. His bereaved family and their legal representative held a press conference in Tokyo to announce the decision.

According to the announcement, the bereaved family had filed for recognition as a job-related accident with the Nagano Prefecture branch of the Local Public Employees' Disaster Compensation Fund, suspecting it was a suicide due to overwork, but the claim was denied two years ago.

The bereaved family then requested a re-examination by the branch's review committee. In addition to the working hours already recognized by the branch, it was newly acknowledged - based on records of outgoing and incoming calls - that Mr. Koganezawa had been handling work-related matters outside of regular working hours, including on holidays and

at night.

(11) Housekeeper Who Worked Live-In for One Week Dies of Overwork; Bereaved Family Reaches Settlement with Company

The bereaved family of a housekeeper who worked live-in at a household caring for a bed-ridden elderly person, died following prolonged working hours, and had her death recognized as an occupational accident in court, reached a settlement with the company on condition that it take measures to prevent recurrence.

This was announced on April 8 at a press conference in Tokyo held by the bereaved family of the woman - who was 68 years old at the time of her death in 2015 while working as a housekeeper - and their legal representative.

The woman was registered with a company in Tokyo as a housekeeper and home-visit care worker, and died after working live-in for one week at a household with a bedridden elderly person, performing housework and caregiving duties.

In the litigation over whether the death constituted an occupational accident, the first instance court dismissed the bereaved family's claim on the grounds that housekeeping work is excluded from workers' accident compensation under law, among other reasons. However, the Tokyo High Court overturned the first instance ruling, finding that although no employment contract had been signed, the woman had been performing housework and care as duties under the company's direction, and recognized the death as an occupational accident.

Following the ruling, the bereaved family had been seeking damages from the company. In February of this year, a settlement was reached on condition that the company acknowledge the fact of death due to overwork from prolonged working hours, post a letter of apology and measures to prevent recurrence on its website, and pay a settlement amount.

3. Situation/Statistics

(1) Foreign Residents Exceed 4 Million for First Time - Immigration Services Agency: "Specified Skilled Worker" Visas Rise to Address Labor Shortages

The Immigration Services Agency announced that the number of foreign residents in Japan at the end of 2025 reached 4,125,395, setting a new record high for the fourth consecutive year. This represents an increase of 356,418 people (9.5%) compared to the same period the previous year. The figure surpassing 4 million is a first. By prefecture, Tokyo has the highest number of foreign residents at 801,438 (up 8.5% from the same period the previous year), accounting for 19.4% of the national total. This is followed by concentrations in major metropolitan areas: Osaka with 375,319, Aichi with 357,800, and Kanagawa with 317,353.

"Number of Foreign Residents as of End of 2025 (Reiwa 7)" March 27, 2026 Immigration Services Agency

<https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001459094.pdf>

(2) 2,798 Food Products to See Price Increases in April - First Time Exceeding 2,000 Items Since October Last Year

According to a survey by private research firm Teikoku Databank targeting 195 major domestic food manufacturers, 2,798 food products are set to see price increases in April.

This is the first time the number has exceeded 2,000 since October last year.

"Seasonings" such as mayonnaise and dressings account for the largest share at 1,514 items, followed by "processed foods" such as instant noodles and cup soups at 609 items, and "alcoholic beverages and drinks" such as whiskey and shochu at 369 items.

An investigation into the reasons for the 5,729 planned price increases between January and July of this year found that "rising raw material costs" was the most common factor at 99.8%, followed by "logistics costs" at 72.9% and "packaging and materials" driven by rising tray costs at 68.8%.

"Price Revision Trends for Major 195 Food Companies - April 2026" March 31, 2026 Teikoku Databank

<https://www.tdb.co.jp/report/economic/neage26y03/>

(3) Part-Time Wage Increase of 6.63%; Hourly Rate Up 80.4 Yen - UA Zensen

According to the spring wage negotiation settlement status announced by UA Zensen - the industrial labor union covering distribution, textiles, and other industries - on April 3, the wage increase rate for part-time employees, who make up 60% of union members, averaged 6.63% (as of 10:00 a.m. on April 1), equivalent to 80.4 yen per hour. Both figures were the highest since the union's establishment in 2012, though they fell short of the union's demands. For full-time employees, the increase was 5.21%, or 17,024 yen per month.

The wage increase rate is the total figure including base pay increases (base-up) and regular pay increments. UA Zensen had demanded a 7% increase (85 yen per hour) for part-time employees and a 6% increase (18,000 yen per month) for full-time employees in this spring round of negotiations.

(4) Welfare Recipients: Single Recipients in Their 20s Increase Sevenfold Compared to 25 Years Ago

A survey on the status of welfare recipients in fiscal year 2024 (Reiwa 6) was released, showing that the number of recipient households exceeded 1.65 million, the highest on record, with households headed by persons aged 65 or older accounting for more than half. At the same time, the number of single recipients in their 20s has continued to increase, reaching seven times the level of 25 years ago.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the monthly average number of welfare recipient households in fiscal year 2024 was 1,650,674, the highest since records began in fiscal year 1956 (Showa 31).

While households headed by persons aged 65 or older account for more than half, the number of households headed by people in their 20s has been increasing in recent years. Although their share of the total is small at just over 2%, the number of recipient households headed by people in their 20s is 38,372, marking six consecutive years of increase. NHK compiled the number of welfare recipients in their 20s and found that in fiscal year 2024, there were 61,596 people in this age group, of whom 28,476 lived alone, accounting for 46% of all recipients in their 20s.

In fiscal year 1999, of the 26,861 welfare recipients in their 20s, 4,091 - or 15% - lived alone. Over 25 years, the number has grown approximately sevenfold, and the proportion has increased significantly compared to other age groups, indicating a rapid rise in single-person households among welfare recipients in their 20s.

Furthermore, among households headed by people in their 20s, "persons with disabilities or illness" accounted for nearly half - 17,913 households - roughly four times the number of 25 years ago.

It was found that the increase in welfare recipient households headed by people in their 20s is partly driven by a growing number of people unable to work due to disability or illness.

(5) Corporate Bankruptcies Exceed 10,000 for Second Consecutive Year; Rising Prices and Labor Shortages Hit Small and Medium Enterprises Hard

Corporate bankruptcies nationwide in fiscal year 2025 totaled 10,425 cases, exceeding 10,000 for the second consecutive year following fiscal year 2024 (10,070 cases). Small-scale bankruptcies accounted for the majority, highlighting the difficult situation facing small and micro enterprises that have been unable to pass on rising costs - including prolonged price increases, rising labor costs, and higher interest burdens - to their selling prices, resulting in deteriorating cash flow. On a monthly basis, March saw 943 cases, indicating the bankruptcy trend continues to grow.

"National Corporate Bankruptcy Report - Fiscal Year 2025" April 8, 2026 Teikoku Databank

<https://bit.ly/tdb202604>

(6) Real Wages for February Rise for Second Consecutive Month; Electricity and Gas Subsidies Help Slow Price Increases

Real wages per worker in February, adjusted for prices, rose 1.9% from the same month the previous year, marking a second consecutive month of positive growth. This was due to a slowdown in price increases, and two consecutive months of positive growth has not been seen for 14 months. While the United States and Iran agreed to a two-week cease-fire, depending on future developments, accelerating price increases could put downward pressure on real wages.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare released the February Monthly Labour Survey (preliminary report) on April 8. Total cash earnings - corresponding to "nominal wages" actually received by workers - rose 3.3% to 298,341 yen, marking 50 consecutive months of positive growth.

Scheduled cash earnings including base pay rose 3.3% to 269,154 yen, and "regular wages" including overtime pay rose 3.3% to 289,288 yen, the highest rate of growth in 33 years. Scheduled cash earnings for full-time regular workers rose 3.7%, the highest increase on record, likely driven by high wage increases from spring labor negotiations. Meanwhile, the rate of price increases slowed, and real wages turned positive. The Consumer Price Index used to calculate real wages (comprehensive index excluding imputed rent for owner-occupied housing) rose 1.4%, slowing from the 1.7% increase in January. This reflects the abolition of the former provisional gasoline tax rate and, from February, electricity and gas subsidies. A stabilization of rice prices in food products is also believed to have contributed.

"Monthly Labour Survey - Preliminary Results for February 2026 (Reiwa 8)" April 8, 2026
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/monthly/r08/2602p/dl/pdf2602p.pdf>