



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Japan

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2007](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
March 11, 2008

Japan is a parliamentary democracy with a population of approximately 127.7 million. Sovereignty is vested in the citizenry, and the emperor is defined as the symbol of state. On September 25, Yasuo Fukuda replaced Shinzo Abe as prime minister and head of a coalition composed of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito Party. In elections on July 29, the Democratic Party of Japan ended the LDP's half-century dominance of the Diet when it captured a majority in the upper house. The elections were generally considered free and fair. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the rights of its citizens. There were some cases of violence and other abuse against women and children and of sexual harassment. Despite government efforts to combat human trafficking, it remained a problem. Employment discrimination against women occurred, and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported discrimination against ethnic and other minorities.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and the government generally respected these provisions in practice. Unlike in past years, there were no reports of violence against prisoners or detainees.

At year's end the civil case against three police officers convicted for the 2004 death of a suspect who was being held in a police detention center was still pending.

The government continued to deny death-row inmates and their families information about the date of execution. Families of condemned prisoners were notified of the execution after the fact. Condemned prisoners, although held in solitary confinement for an average of seven years and five months until their execution, were allowed visits by their families and lawyers and, following revisions to penal regulations that took effect during the year, by other persons as well.

Prisoner rights NGOs reported that prison management regularly abused the rules on solitary confinement for prisoners. Although the Prison Law Enforcement Regulation stipulates the maximum time prisoners may be held in solitary confinement, it gives wardens broad leeway. Punitive solitary confinement may be imposed for a maximum of 60 days, but procedures allow wardens to keep prisoners in "isolation" solitary confinement indefinitely.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions generally met international standards. However, several facilities were overcrowded, lacked heating, and provided inadequate food and medical care. NGOs reported that inmates in some institutions were given insufficient clothing and blankets to protect themselves against cold weather. In August two men in detention facilities that lacked air conditioning or fans died of heatstroke. NGOs, lawyers, and doctors criticized healthcare in prisons, police-operated

preindictment detention centers, and immigration detention centers.

Unlike in past years, there were no reports of rape or brutality against prisoners.

Regulations do not require that minors be held separately from adults in immigration detention centers; however, unlike in past years there were no reports of minors being held in the same correctional or immigration detention facilities as adults. NGOs reported that the two 16-year-old Kurdish immigrants who had been held in an Ibaraki Prefecture immigration detention center alongside adults in 2006 had been granted provisional release, but their refugee applications were still pending.

Prison management regulations stipulate that independent committees inspect prisons and detention centers operated by the Ministry of Justice. These committees included physicians, lawyers, local municipal officials, NGO representatives, and other local citizens. Prisoner rights advocates reported that the committees visited Ministry of Justice prisons throughout the year. In June the committees began inspecting police-operated detention centers as well. There was no independent inspection regime for immigration detention centers. Human rights NGOs reported that in comparison to past years, there appeared to be an increased flow of correspondence in and out of prisons.

In May the UN Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) criticized immigration detention centers for alleged violence, the unlawful use of restraining devices, sexual harassment, and lack of access to healthcare. UNCAT also criticized the lack of an independent monitor of immigration detention centers.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the National Police Agency (NPA) and local police forces, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year. However, some NGOs criticized local public safety commissions for lacking independence from or sufficient authority over police agencies.

Arrest and Detention

Persons were apprehended openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and issued by a duly authorized official, and detainees were brought before an independent judiciary.

The law provides detainees the right to a prompt judicial determination of the legality of the detention, and authorities respected this right in practice. The law requires authorities to inform detainees immediately of the charges against them. Authorities usually held suspects in police-operated detention centers for an initial 72 hours. A judge must interview a suspect prior to further detention. The judge may extend pre-indictment custody by up to two consecutive 10-day periods. Prosecutors routinely sought and received these extensions. Prosecutors may also apply for an additional five-day extension.

The code of criminal procedure allows detainees, their families, or representatives to request that the court release an indicted detainee on bail. However, bail was not available preindictment to persons detained in police-operated detention centers.

Unlike in past years, preindictment detainees had access to counsel, including court-appointed attorneys, but prisoner advocates said that in practice this access was limited both in duration and frequency. Counsel may not be present during interrogations at any time. Family members were allowed to meet with detainees, but only in the presence of a detention officer.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence in practice.

There are several levels of courts, including family and summary courts, district courts, high courts, and the Supreme Court, which serves as the court of final appeal.

Trial Procedures

The law provides the right to a fair trial for all citizens and ensures that each charged individual receives a public trial by an independent civilian court, has access to defense counsel, and has the right to cross-examine witnesses. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, and defendants cannot be compelled to testify against themselves.

UNCAT, NGOs, and lawyers questioned whether defendants were presumed innocent in practice. According to legal advocacy NGOs, the majority of detainees who were indicted confessed while in police custody. Safeguards exist to ensure that suspects cannot be compelled to confess to a crime or be convicted when a confession is the only evidence, but a manual of police interrogation procedures showed that police investigators are authorized to use heavy pressure to extract confessions. The use of police-operated detention centers, which puts suspects in the custody of their interrogators, has been on the rise for more than 30 years. According to government statistics, more than 98 percent of arrested suspects were sent to police detention facilities. The other 2 percent were held in Ministry of Justice-operated preindictment detention centers. More than 99 percent of cases that reached a trial court resulted in conviction.

During the year there were widespread media reports of persons convicted on the basis of police-obtained confessions, who were later proved innocent. In January the Toyama prefectural police and District Public Prosecutor's Office admitted that a man had been wrongly convicted and served 25 months in prison based on "insufficient" evidence. In August the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office released a report acknowledging that investigators sometimes placed too much emphasis on confessions and recommending measures to prevent false charges.

Trial procedures favor the prosecution. Although the law provides for access to counsel, a significant number of defendants reported that this access was insufficient. The law does not require full disclosure by prosecutors, and material that the prosecution does not use in court may be suppressed. The legal representatives of some defendants claimed that they did not receive access to relevant material in the police record.

The language barrier was a serious problem for foreign defendants. No guidelines existed to ensure effective communication between judges, lawyers, and non-Japanese-speaking defendants. No standard licensing or qualification system existed for court interpreters, and trials proceeded even if no translation or interpretation was provided to the accused. Several foreign detainees claimed that police urged them to sign statements in Japanese that they could not read and that were not translated adequately.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters. Cases involving human rights violations have been brought before these courts.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The law provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events. The requirement for Ministry of Education approval of history textbooks has been a subject of controversy, particularly regarding the treatment of certain subjects pertaining to the 20th century.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for the freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Relations among religious groups were generally amicable. An estimated 200 Jewish families lived in the country. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2007 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not use it.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees.

In practice the government provided some protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they feared persecution. However, in May UNCAT noted that Japanese law does not expressly prohibit deportation to countries where there is a risk of torture. In addition, UNCAT criticized the lack of an independent body to review applications for refugee status, the fact that the Ministry of Justice does not allow applicants for refugee status to select legal representatives for appeal, and the restrictions on government legal assistance for nonresidents. UNCAT, NGOs, and lawyers criticized the indefinite and often long period of detention between the rejection of an application for asylum and deportation.

The government granted refugee status or asylum in only a small number of cases. Of 959 claims submitted to the Ministry of Justice in 2006, the government granted refugee status to 34 persons. The country also provided temporary protection to 53 individuals who did not qualify as refugees under either the 1951 convention or the 1967 protocol. The government did not accept any refugees for resettlement during the year.

Refugees faced the same patterns of discrimination that ethnic minorities did in the country: reduced access to housing, education, and employment. Persons whose refugee status was pending or on appeal did not have the legal right to work or receive social welfare, rendering them completely dependent on overcrowded government shelters or the support of NGOs.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The law provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

In July the country held elections for the upper house of the Diet. The elections were considered generally free and fair.

Political parties operated without restriction or outside interference.

Women held 45 of 480 seats in the lower house of the Diet and 43 of the upper house's 242 seats. At year's end there were five female governors. There were two women in the 18-member cabinet. Because some ethnic minorities are of mixed heritage and do not self-identify, it was difficult to determine the number of minorities that served in the Diet. In the past an Ainu served in the upper house, and currently some Diet members are naturalized citizens.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were several reports of government corruption during the year. According to NPA figures for 2006, there were 74 cases involving bribery and 42 cases of bid rigging, compared with 65 for bribery and 17 for bid rigging during 2005. There were regular media reports of financial accounting scandals involving politicians and government officials.

The public has the legal right to access government information. There were no reports that the government denied legal requests for information or required information seekers to pay prohibitive fees to gain access.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without governmental restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials generally were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, language, and social status. Although the government generally enforced these provisions, discrimination against women, ethnic minority groups, and foreigners remained a problem.

Women

The law criminalizes all forms of rape, including spousal rape, and the government generally enforced the law effectively. According to government statistics, 1,948 rapes were reported in 2006, and 153 persons were convicted for rape, and six persons for gang rape. Many police stations had female officers to provide confidential assistance to female victims.

Although prohibited by law, domestic violence against women remained a problem. District courts may impose six-month restraining orders on perpetrators of domestic violence and impose sentences of up to one year in prison or fines of up to \$8,500 (one million yen). In 2006 courts granted 2,208 out of 2,759 petitions for protection orders. The law, which covers common-law marriages and divorced individuals, was amended in July to include protection not only for victims of abuse but also for persons threatened with violence. According to NPA statistics, in 2006 there were 18,236 reported cases of domestic violence. Spousal violence consultation assistance centers reported 57,088 consultation cases in 2006.

Prostitution is illegal but widespread. Domestic sex tourism was not a significant problem.

Sexual harassment in the workplace remained widespread. In fiscal year (FY) 2006 the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (MHLW) received 11,102 reports of such harassment. The law includes measures to identify companies that failed to prevent sexual harassment, but it does not include punitive measures to enforce compliance other than publicizing the names of offending companies. The government established hot lines and designated ombudsmen to handle complaints of discrimination and sexual harassment.

The law prohibits sexual discrimination and provides women the same rights as men. A Council for Gender Equality existed to monitor enforcement; its high-level members included the chief cabinet secretary, cabinet ministers, and Diet members. During the year the council regularly met to examine policies and monitor progress on gender equality.

Inequality in employment remained entrenched in society. Women composed 41.5 percent of the labor force, and their average monthly wage was \$1,988 (222,600 yen), less than two-thirds of the monthly wage earned by men (\$3,015, or 337,700 yen). A June Cabinet Office report showed that among developed countries Japan ranked extremely low in the number of women serving in leadership roles in management or politics.

The issue of "comfort women," or women forced into sexual slavery for Japanese troops in World War II, continued to draw controversy. In 1995 the government established the Asian Women's Fund (AWF), which sent a signed apology from the prime minister along with privately raised financial compensation to each victim. Critics of the policy towards comfort women maintained that the apology letter from the prime minister took moral but not legal responsibility for the suffering endured by the comfort women, and called for the government to pay direct compensation.

Children

The government was committed to the rights and welfare of children, and in general children's rights were protected adequately.

Public school education is provided for up to 12 years. Education is free and compulsory through the lower secondary level (age 15 or the ninth grade). Education was widely available to students who met minimum academic standards at the upper secondary level through age 18. Society placed an extremely high value on education, and enrollment levels for both boys and girls through the upper secondary level exceeded 94.4 percent, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. There were no differences in the treatment of girls and boys at any level of school.

The government provides universal health care for all citizens, including children.

Reports of child abuse continued to increase at an alarming rate. In FY 2006 there were 37,343 reported cases of child abuse by parents or guardians. According to the NPA, 59 children died in FY 2006 after being abused. The law grants child welfare officials the authority to prohibit abusive parents from meeting or communicating with their children. The law also bans abuse under the guise of discipline and mandates that anyone aware of suspicious circumstances must report the information to a nationwide local child-counseling center or municipal welfare center.

The law does not criminalize the possession of child pornography, which often depicted the brutal sexual abuse of small children. The absence of a statutory basis makes it difficult for police to obtain search warrants, preventing them from effectively enforcing existing child pornography laws or participating in international law enforcement efforts in this area. Along with child pornography involving real victims, child molesters used cartoons and comics depicting child pornography to seduce children. Internet Service Providers in Japan acknowledged that the country has become a hub for child pornography, leading to greater victimization of children both domestically and abroad.

Trafficking in Persons

The law establishes human trafficking both for sexual and labor exploitation as a criminal offense.

Nonetheless, human trafficking remained a significant problem despite government efforts, including stricter requirements for entertainment visas and more aggressive investigation and prosecution of offenders. The country remained a destination and transit country for men, women, and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and other purposes. Victims came from China, the Republic of Korea, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent Latin America. There were also reports of internal trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation.

Brokers in the countries of origin recruited women and sold them to intermediaries or employers, who in turn subjected them to debt bondage and coercion. Agents, brokers, and employers involved in trafficking for sexual exploitation often had connections with organized crime.

Most women trafficked into the sex trade had their travel documents taken away and their movements strictly controlled by their employers. Victims were threatened with reprisals to themselves or their families if they tried to escape. Employers often isolated the women, subjected them to constant surveillance, and used violence to punish them for disobedience. NGOs reported that in some cases brokers used drugs to subjugate victims.

Debt bondage was another means of control. Before arrival in the country, trafficking victims generally did not understand the size of the debts they would owe, the amount of time it would take them to repay the debts, or the conditions of employment to which they would be subjected upon arrival. Women typically faced debts of \$26,000 to \$43,000 (three million to five million yen). In addition, they had to pay their employer for their living expenses, medical care (when provided by the employer), and other necessities. "Fines" for misbehavior added to the original debt and the process that employers used to calculate these debts was not transparent. Employers also sometimes "resold," or threatened to resell, troublesome women or women found to be HIV positive, thereby increasing the victims' debts and often leading to even worse working conditions.

In response to increased police enforcement, many sex business operators shifted from store-front businesses to "delivery" escort services. This made it much harder to measure the extent to which employers were exploiting victims of trafficking.

NGOs and the media reported abuses of the "foreign trainee" program, a government-sponsored training program supervised by the Japan International Training Cooperation Organization. In some companies, trainees reportedly were forced to work unpaid overtime and made less than the minimum wage. Moreover, their wages were automatically deposited in company-controlled accounts, despite the fact that "forced deposits" are illegal. According to labor rights NGOs, trainees sometimes had their travel documents taken from them and their movement controlled to "prevent

escape." A government review of the program was ongoing, and in December the Ministry of Justice amended the guidelines governing organizations that accept trainees and interns to prevent further abuses.

There were significant improvements in the country's prosecution of trafficking offenders. In 2006, 78 trafficking suspects were arrested, 17 cases prosecuted, and 15 trafficking offenders convicted under the trafficking statute. This was a significant increase from the few prosecutions and one conviction obtained in 2005. Of the 15 convictions in 2006, 12 offenders received prison sentences ranging from one to seven years; three offenders received suspended sentences.

The NPA oversaw significant improvements in police handling of trafficking cases and identification of victims. Nevertheless, there continued to be reports that police and immigration officers failed to identify victims adequately. For example, NGOs reported that police and immigration officers occasionally neglected to classify women working in exploitative conditions as victims because they willingly entered the country to work illegally.

The MHLW encouraged police and immigration officers to use its preexisting network of shelters for domestic violence victims as temporary housing for foreign trafficking victims awaiting repatriation. The government paid for victims' medical care and subsidized repatriation through a grant to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The MHLW reported that in FY 2006, 36 women were protected in private and public shelters, and IOM representatives helped 41 women return home with the government's support.

Typically, government shelters lacked the resources needed to provide adequate services to trafficking victims. NGO shelters that specialized in assisting victims of human trafficking had full-time staff able to speak seven or more languages, but the MHLW shelters had to rely on interpretation services from outside providers. Without sufficient counseling in their native language by professionals familiar with the special needs of trafficking victims, foreign women staying at government shelters elected to repatriate as quickly as possible. Although the government reserved funds to subsidize victims' stays in private shelters, the majority of victims were referred to public shelters.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment, education, and access to health care, and the government generally enforced these provisions effectively. The government supported the right of persons with disabilities to participate in civic affairs.

Persons with disabilities were not generally subject to overt discrimination in employment, education, or provision of other state services; however, in practice they faced limited access to these services. Persons with disabilities made up less than 0.2 percent of university students.

The law mandates that the government and private companies hire minimum proportions of persons with disabilities (including mental disabilities). Companies with more than 300 employees that do not comply must pay a fine of \$425 (50,000 yen) per vacant position per month. Public employment of persons with disabilities exceeded the minimum, but according to MHLW statistics the private sector lagged in spite of increases over last year.

In December 2006 revisions to accessibility laws mandated that new construction projects for public use must include provisions for persons with disabilities. In addition, the government allows operators of hospitals, theaters, hotels, and other public-use facilities to receive low-interest loans and tax benefits if they upgrade or install features to accommodate persons with disabilities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Burakumin (descendants of feudal era "outcasts") and ethnic minorities experienced varying degrees of societal discrimination. The approximately three million burakumin, although not subject to governmental discrimination, frequently were victims of entrenched societal discrimination, including restricted access to housing, education, and employment opportunities. NGOs reported that discrimination was still extensive outside major metropolitan areas.

Despite legal safeguards against discrimination, the country's large populations of Korean, Chinese, Brazilian, and Filipino permanent residents--many of whom were born, raised, and educated in Japan--were subject to various forms of deeply entrenched societal discrimination, including restricted access to housing, education, and employment opportunities. There was a widespread perception among citizens that "foreigners," often members of Japan-born ethnic minorities, were responsible for most of the crimes committed in the country. The media fostered this perception although Ministry of Justice statistics showed that the "foreigner"-committed crime rate, excepting crimes like illegal entry and overstay, was lower than the crime rate for citizens.

Many immigrants struggled to overcome obstacles to naturalization, including the broad discretion available to adjudicating officers and the great emphasis on Japanese-language ability. Aliens with five years of continuous residence are eligible for naturalization and citizenship rights. Naturalization procedures also require an extensive background check, which

includes inquiries into the applicant's economic status and assimilation into society. The government defended its naturalization procedures as necessary to ensure the smooth assimilation of foreigners into society.

Indigenous People

The 1997 Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture and Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture (Culture Promotion Law) recognized the Ainu as an ethnic minority, required all prefectural governments to develop basic programs for promoting Ainu culture and traditions, canceled previous laws that discriminated against the Ainu, and required the government of Hokkaido to return Ainu communal assets. Although the Ainu enjoyed the same rights as all other citizens, when clearly identifiable as Ainu they faced the same patterns of discrimination that all ethnic minorities encountered.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation or against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and the government effectively enforced the law. Unions were free of government control and influence; however, public service employees' basic union rights, governed by a separate law, are considerably restricted in ways that "effectively require prior authorization" to form unions. Approximately 18 percent of the total workforce was unionized in 2006.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

Except for public sector workers and employees of state-owned enterprises, the law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government protected this right. Collective bargaining is protected by law and was freely practiced. Unions have the right to strike, and workers exercised this right in practice.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred. Labor rights NGOs alleged that some companies forced foreign laborers to work illegal overtime, refused to pay them allowances, controlled their movement and travel documents, and forced them to deposit paychecks into company-controlled accounts. The law and Ministry of Justice guidelines prohibit these practices.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law bans the exploitation of children in the workplace, and the government effectively implemented the law. The MHLW is responsible for enforcement. By law, children between the ages of 15 and 18 may perform any job that is not designated as dangerous or harmful. Children between the ages of 13 and 15 may perform "light labor" only, and children under 13 may work only in the entertainment industry. Other than victims of human trafficking and child pornography, child labor was not a problem.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Minimum wages are set on a prefectural and industry basis, with the input of tripartite (workers, employers, and public interest) advisory councils. Employers covered by a minimum wage must post the concerned minimum wages, and compliance with minimum wages was considered widespread. Minimum wage rates ranged, according to prefecture, from \$5.74 (618 yen) to \$6.54 (739 yen) per hour. The minimum daily wage provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The law provides for a 40-hour workweek for most industries and mandates premium pay for hours worked above 40 in a week or eight in a day. However, it was widely accepted within the population that workers, including those in government jobs, routinely exceeded the hours outlined in the law. Labor unions frequently criticized the government for failing to enforce maximum working hour regulations.

According to the Trade Union Confederation, companies increasingly hire workers on a part-time, non-regular basis. Such

workers reportedly made up one-third of the labor force, and worked for lower wages, enduring insecure working conditions. Temporary employees reportedly also faced the same unfair working conditions. Activist groups claimed that employers exploited illegal foreign workers, who often had little or no knowledge of the Japanese language or their legal rights.

The government sets occupational health and safety standards, and the Ministry of Labor effectively administered the various laws and regulations governing occupational health and safety. Labor inspectors have the authority to suspend unsafe operations immediately, and the law provides that workers may voice concerns over occupational safety and remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)