

Foreign Press Center
Population Decline and
Immigration Policy—
Making Japan a Popular
Destination for Immigration

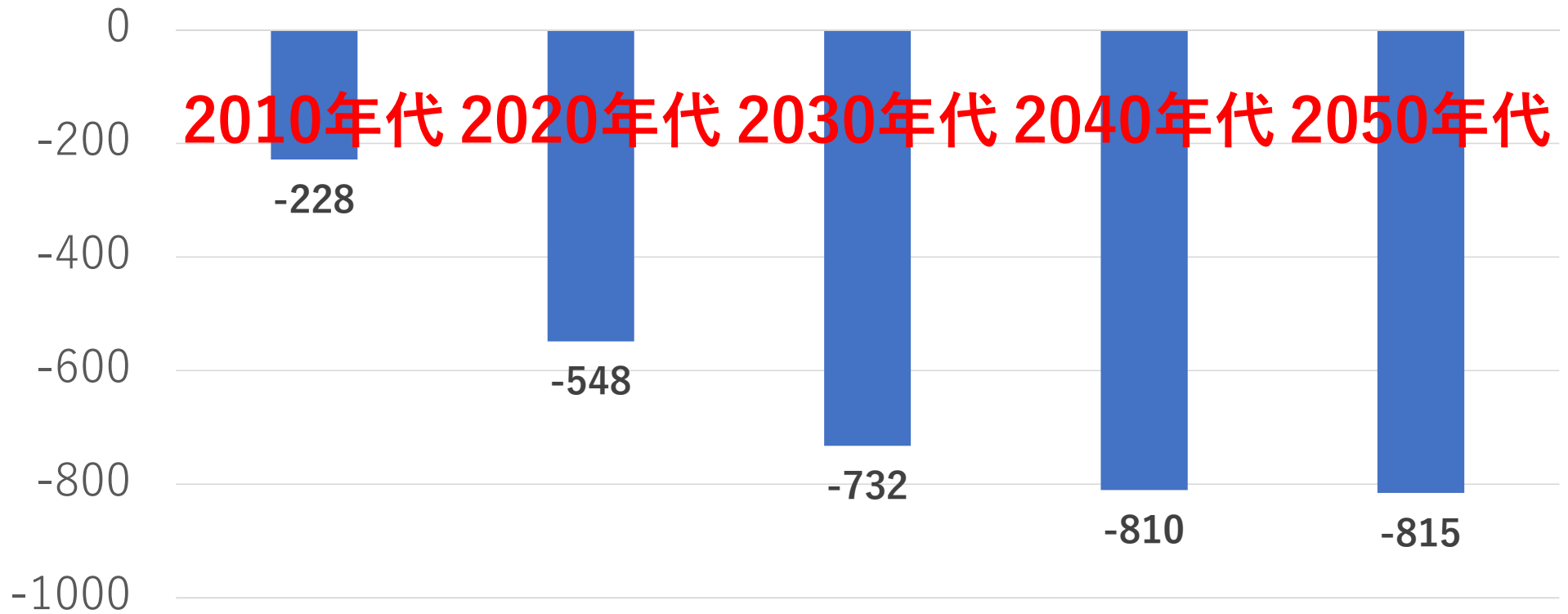
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Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE)

Accelerating population decline in Japan



Reference : Shikoku (3.8 million) 、 Hokkaido (5.4 million) 、 Chugoku Region (7.3 million)

Already having an impact

- . On average more than 470 public primary and secondary schools closed every year
- . Number of public schools closed from 2002-2020: 8,580

(Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2021 Survey on the Status of Utilization of Closed School Facilities)

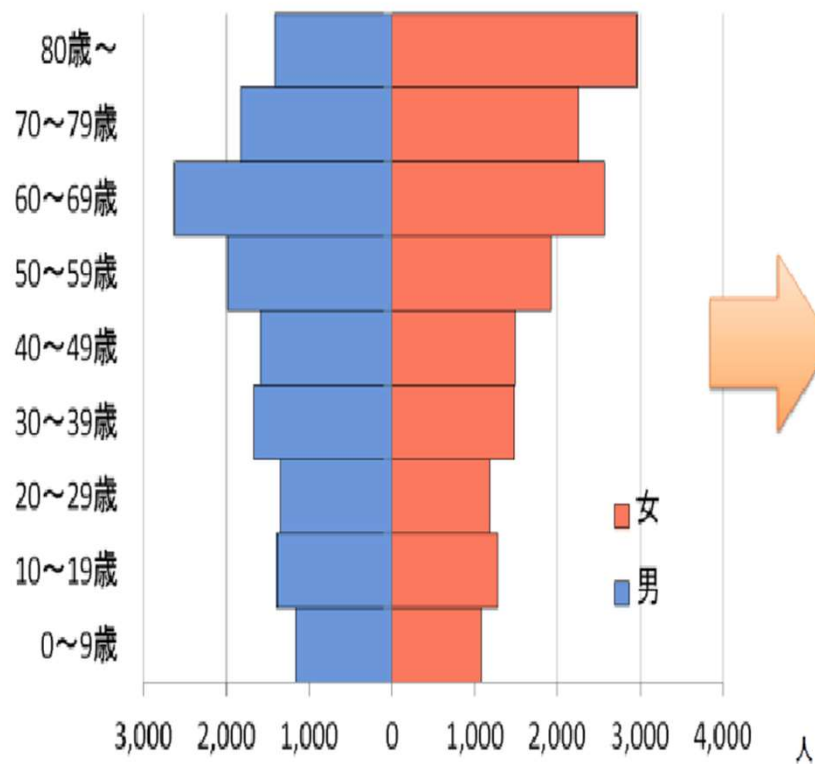
Discontinued bus routes:
More than 1,000 km on average
every year

路線バスの廃止キロの推移（単位：km）

2010年度	1,720
2011年度	842
2012年度	902
2013年度	1,143
2014年度	1,590
2015年度	1,312
2016年度	883
2017年度	1,090
2018年度	1,306
合計	10,788

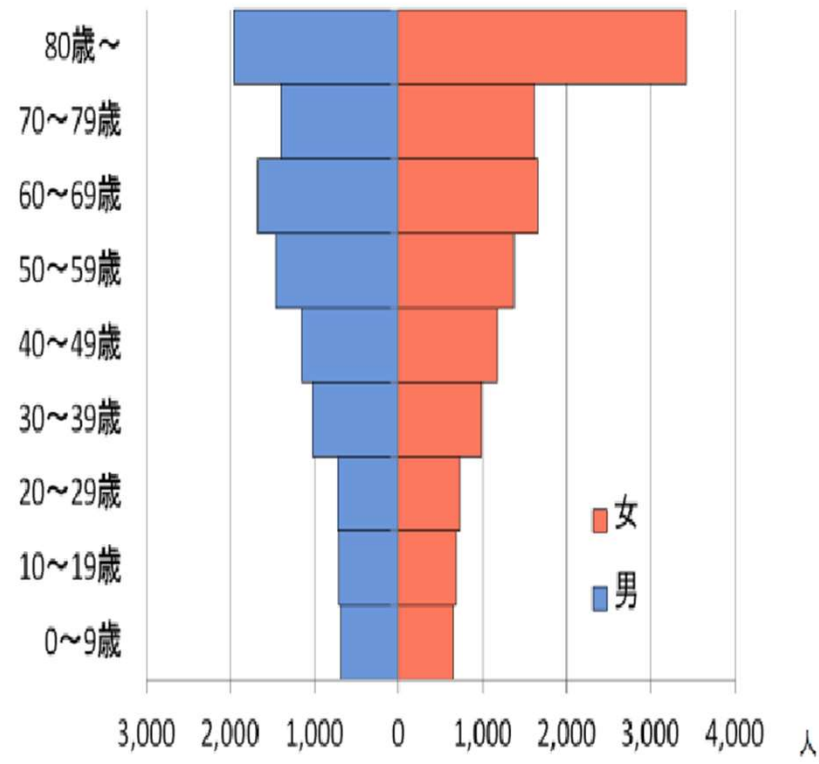
Akitakata, Hiroshima in 2035

安芸高田市 男女年齢別人口
2012年(H24)12月末現在

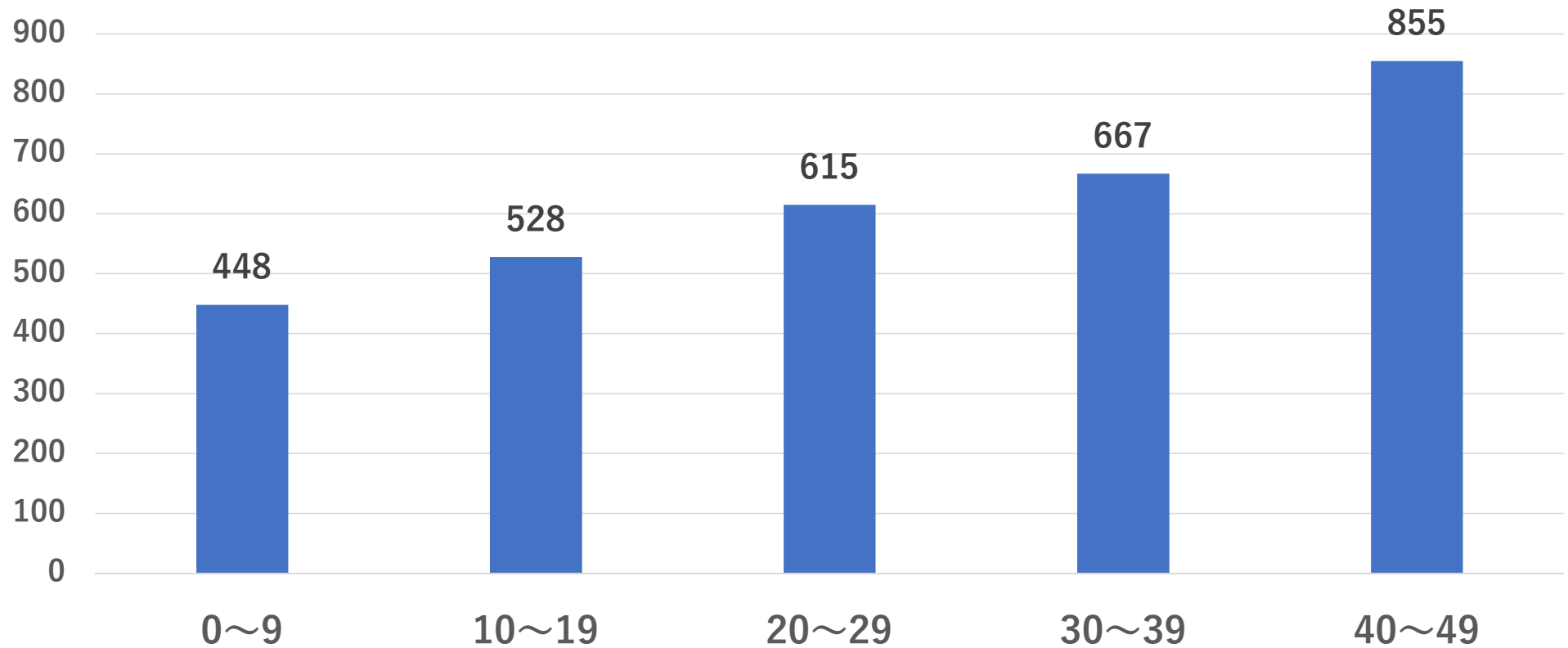


安芸高田市 男女年齢別人口予測

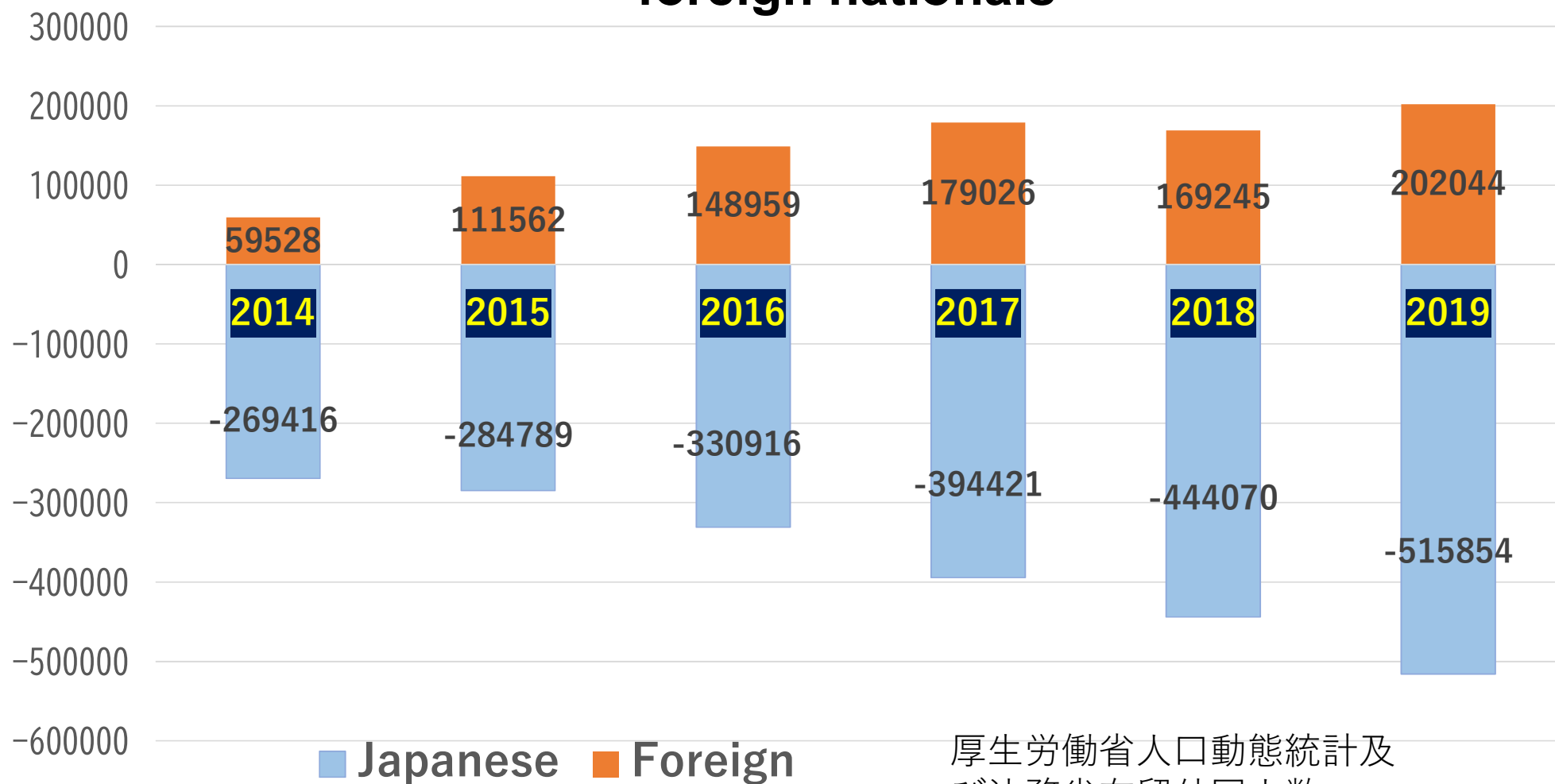
2035年(H47年)22年後 出典)国立社会保障・人口問題研究所「市町村の将来推計人口」



Female population by age group (As of December 2022)



Change in the number of Japanese citizens and foreign nationals

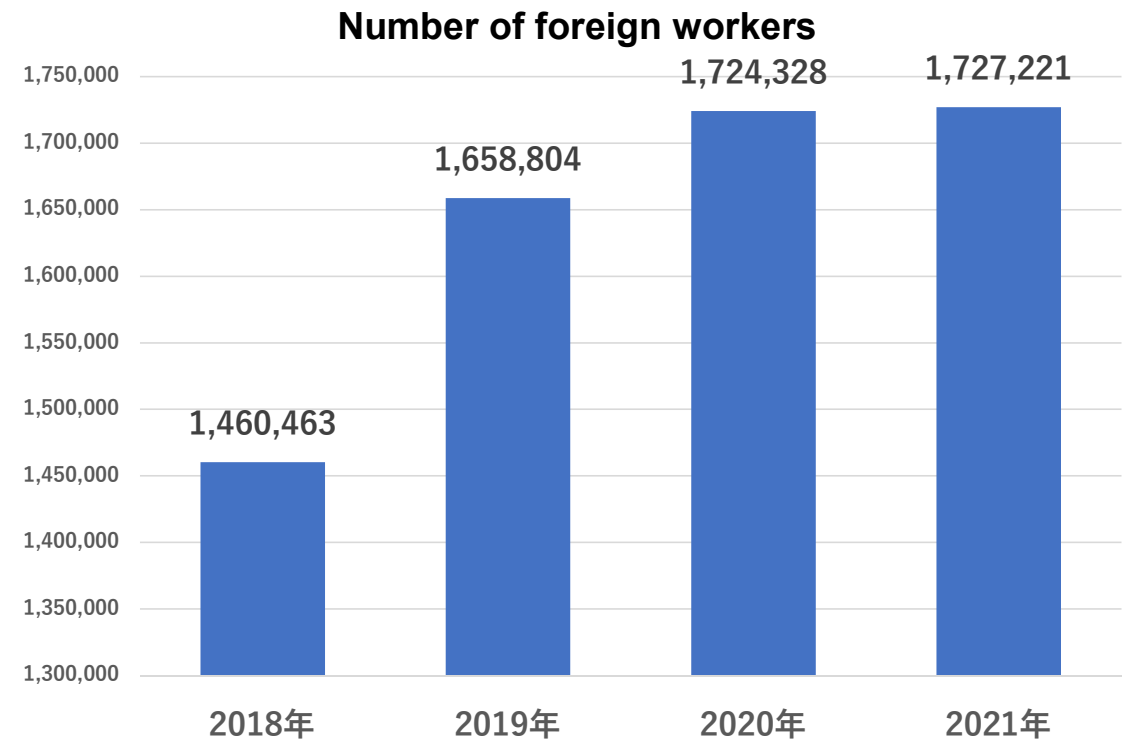
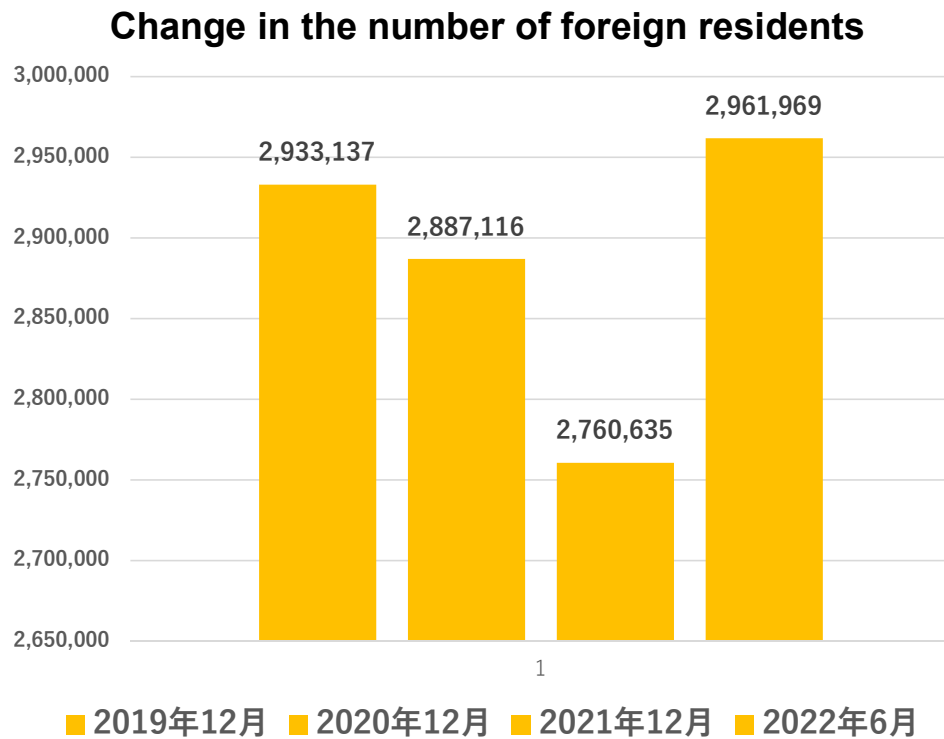


厚生労働省人口動態統計及
び法務省在留外国人数

Population change in metropolitan areas with population growth

	Change from 2016 to 2018			
	Population growth (Total)	Population (Japanese)	Population (Foreigners)	Percentage of foreigners in population growth
Tokyo	221,997	149,537	72,460	32.6%
Aichi	42,204	8,596	33,608	79.6%
Saitama	39,598	11,939	27,659	69.8%
Kanagawa	35,123	11,046	24,077	68.6%
Chiba	33,093	9,971	23,122	69.9%
Okinawa	10,305	7,466	2,839	27.5%
Fukuoka	8,325	-3,014	11,339	136.2%

Change in the number of foreign residents during the COVID-19 pandemic



The plight of foreigners during the COVID-19 pandemic

Government response

- Granting "Designated Activities" status of residence to those who have difficulty returning to their home countries, which allows them to work
- Establishing of multilingual consultation offices, providing information in multiple languages, etc.

The plight during the pandemic as seen in the activities of the private sector

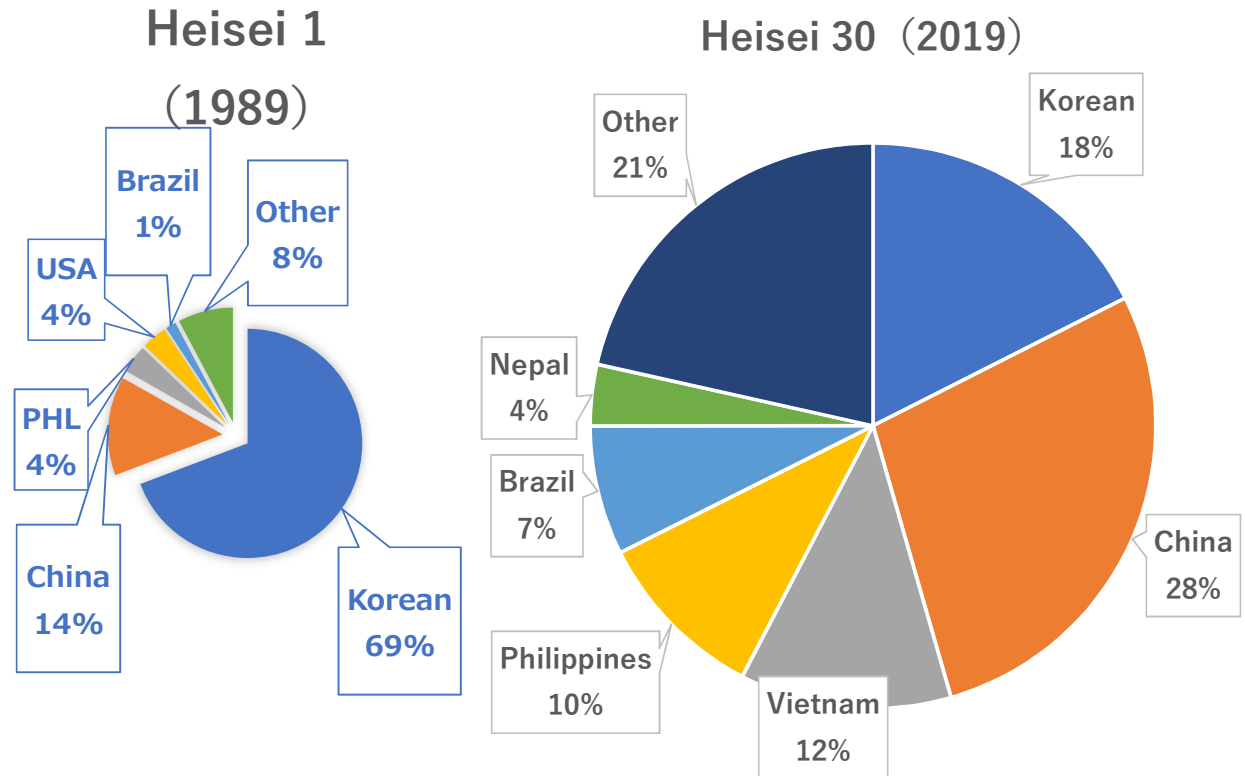
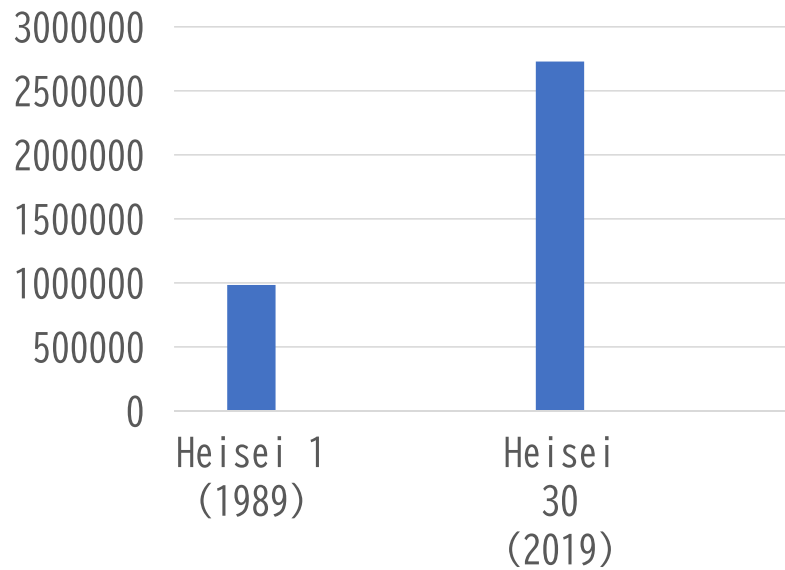
- The NPO Anti-Poverty Network collected approximately 60 million yen from the public as an "Anti-Poverty Emergency Mutual Support Fund". 67% of the total collected was ultimately distributed to foreign nationals living in Japan
- Second Harvest Japan is an NPO that provides food assistance. The ratio of Japanese to foreign users was 6 to 4 before COVID-19, but after pandemic, the ratio flipped to 4 to 6.
- At YSC (Youth Support Center), an NPO, 30% of tuition fees were partially exempted from monthly fees before the pandemic. In FY2020, 70% of students needed a 100% exemption from monthly fees.
- Vietnamese experts surveyed Vietnamese residents in Japan (mostly technical intern trainees). Of the 77 responses, 66% said that the pandemic had an impact on their work. The number of respondents who received pay of less than 100,000 yen per month increased from 10 before the pandemic to 29.

➔ The working and living environment for foreign residents in Japan was vulnerable even before COVID-19, and the pandemic exposed this fact.

Increase in the number of foreign residents and diversification of nationalities during the Heisei period

Change in nationalities of foreign residents

Increase in the number of foreign residents during the Heisei period



Current status and issues of foreign residents

During the 30 years of the Heisei era (1989-2019), the government, society, and businesses assumed that foreign residents were temporary residents and did not put a support system in place.

Dependence on "multicultural coexistence" by local governments and private organizations.

➔The foreign population increased from approximately 1 million to just under 3 million; foreign residents became more multinational and people began to settle down in Japan

➔However, because the government was not operating on an assumption of permanent residency, the expansion of irregular labor (dispatch and contract work), lack of Japanese language skills, and lack of education and employment support for youth became the norm

➔This led to a cycle of economic poverty, lack of Japanese language skills, and children's lack of academic ability

Current situation of foreign residents

1. Low level of Japanese language proficiency among foreign residents

- **Number of people learning Japanese: 123,408**

(2021 Japanese Language Education Fact-Finding Survey Report)

- **Can read a few kanji: 48.5%**

(2001 Survey of Foreign Residents' Attitudes Toward the Japanese Language) (Agency for Cultural Affairs)

2. Employment Issues

Percentage working as dispatched/contracted workers: 20.4%

Japan as a whole : 2.5% (MHLW)

3. School education

High School Enrollment Rate: 40.1% (Hitachi Foundation estimate)

High school dropout rate: 5.5% (Overall 1.0%) (MEXT)

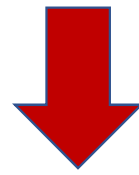
Preexisting issues



Volunteer-led Japanese language education



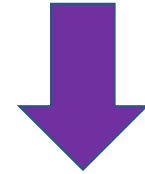
- Low Japanese language skills
- Inconveniences in daily life, friction with Japanese people, occupational disadvantages



Perception of being temporary workers



- Dependence on technical interns and foreign students (acting as an adjustment valve for employment)
- Expansion of low-wage dependent industries



Foreign children not in compulsory education



- Expansion of out-of-school children
- Insufficient academic ability, drop-outs

COVID-19 pandemic occurred while the issues facing foreigners remained unresolved

Immigration—Two scenarios

1. Cases which will fail

- Due to assumption of temporary stay, foreign nationals with low Japanese language ability and work skills become standard
- Companies rely on low-wage labor and neglect innovation
- Expansion of double-limited generation due to lack of progress in improving Japanese language skills

2. Cases which will succeed

- Foreign nationals with high Japanese language skills and ability seek to come to Japan
- Increased productivity in host companies, increased contribution to local communities
- Stimulation of Japanese people, synergistic effect of "multicultural power"
- Improvement of sustainability of society and companies

Changes to government policy from 2018 onward

1. December 2018: Revision of Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act

- Established a new residency category, Specified Skilled Worker
- Established the Immigration Services Agency and its Residency Management and Support Department

2. December 2018: Comprehensive Measures for Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Nationals

Already revised 4 times. Now 218 policies.

3. June 2022: Roadmap for the Realization of a Society of Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals

“Support for each life stage and life cycle”

4. November 2022: Report on “State of Regional Japanese Language Education”

Calls for all municipalities to establish guidelines for Japanese language education, clearly states that businesses have a responsibility, sets B1-level Japanese language skills as a target (320 to 520 hours)

Creation of Specified Skilled Worker category with 2018 revision to Immigration Act

Created a new residency category (Specified Skilled Worker) for working in Japan for up to five years, with the possibility of allowing those who then pass a test to be accompanied by their families and settle permanently (Specified Skilled Worker (ii))

Issues

- Having to find work on their own with low Japanese language skills, lack of competency until they can live independently.**
- Permanent residency as a blue-collar worker. Inconsistency of the Technical Intern Training Program and Specified Skilled Workers coexisting.**
- Inconsistency of Technical Interns being able to become Specified Skilled Workers after finishing their training.**

June 2022: Roadmap for the Realization of a Society of Harmonious Coexistence with Foreign Nationals

1. Three Visions for an Ideal Society of Harmonious Coexistence

- A society where foreign nationals are included, and all people can live safely and comfortably
- A diverse and vibrant society where foreign nationals can participate
- A society respecting human rights, without discrimination or prejudice

2. Medium- to Long-term Issues to be Addressed (Four Key Points)

1. Initiatives such as Japanese language education
2. Disseminating information to foreign nationals/Strengthening consultation systems for foreign nationals
3. Support for each life stage and life cycle
4. Initiatives to establish the foundation of a society of harmonious coexistence (raising public awareness among Japanese nationals, education, expanding statistics, etc.)

→Without publicly announcing it, the government has already begun its immigration policy (assumption of permanent residency for foreign nationals)

Issues for supporting foreign nationals

1. The complex nature of issues

With the diversity of residency statuses, languages, cultures, nationalities, and age groups, outreach is difficult, and considerate, individualized support is necessary

2. Wide range of areas to support

In addition to the three main themes (work, Japanese language, education), there is also paperwork/procedures, healthcare, and daily life in general

3. Vast number of people and stakeholders

2.96 million foreign residents (increased by 200,000 in half a year), 285,000 companies with foreign employees

4. Insufficient support system

Lack of expertise in local governments, civilian organizations primarily formed of volunteers, lack of funding

Public opinion of foreign nationals

Yomiuri Shimbun,
March 2019 national
survey

**Do you think an
increase in the
number of foreign
residents is a good
thing?**

“Good/Relatively
good” 71%

“Bad” 27%

Shinjuku, 2015
multicultural coexistence
survey (Shinjuku
population: 320,000, 11%
foreign nationals)

**What do you think of
foreigners living nearby?**

“Desirable/Relatively
desirable” 22.1%

“Undesirable/Relatively
undesirable” 16.9%
 (“Undesirable” 4.4%)

“Unsure” 55.3%

Soja, Okayama, 2016
survey on multicultural
coexistence promotion
policies (Soja population:
68,000, 1.2% foreign
nationals)

**What do you think of the
number of foreign
nationals increasing?**

“Approve/Slightly approve”
22.8%

“Oppose/Slightly oppose”
12.6% (“Oppose” 5.2%)

“Unsure” 64.6%

Events in 2022

1. Acceptance of Ukrainian “evacuees”

Ukrainians were accepted as “evacuees,” not official refugees, at the direction of the prime minister (no legal basis)

2. Review of Technical Intern Training Program and Specified Skilled Workers began

3. New proposals from private organizations

Keidanren: Innovating Migration Policies—The State of Policies on Foreign Nationals Towards 2030

Suggesting strategically promoting immigration

JICA: Investigative Study on the Realization of a Society of Coexistence with Foreign Nationals Towards 2030/2040

By 2040, 6.74 million foreign workers will be necessary

JCIE: The State of Immigration Policy Towards the Post-COVID Era—New Proposals to Become a Country Chosen for Immigration

Making Japan a country chosen for immigration

1. Government leaders should clearly state the change in policy

Currently, it is a “stealth” immigration policy

2. Immigration policy needs to be reconsidered starting from zero, based on predictions for demographic changes

- What kind of people (Japanese level) should be allowed in each year, and how many
- Create a comprehensive support system for once they are in Japan
- KPI: The goal should be for second-generation immigrants to have the same education and income level as other Japanese nationals

3. Change perception by general public, businesses, and local governments

- Perception not as temporary residents, but as important members of society
 - People with diverse experiences, values, and networks that Japanese nationals do not have
- ➔ Hopes to act as shock therapy to escape the current stagnation
- Escape from Chuo University Professor Masahiro Yamada’s “happily declining Japan”

Why did immigration become taboo in Japan?

1. Debates over immigration took place until the 2000s

1999: The Cabinet Secretariat of the Obuchi Cabinet clearly stated the necessity of immigration in the “Framework for a 21st Century Japan”

2008: “Open the country for workers! Proposal of a Japan-style immigration policy,” LDP, Yasuo Fukuda Cabinet

2. Change of government (Democratic Party of Japan, 2009 to 2012)

Extending local voting rights to permanent residents became an issue of debate

3. Territorial disputes with neighboring countries (China, South Korea), worsening relations

2010–: Senkaku Islands, Takeshima

4. Establishment of second Abe administration, strong right-leaning support (2012–)

(Reference)

JCIE: The State of Immigration Policy Towards the Post-COVID Era—New Proposals to Become a Country Chosen for Immigration



**July 2021: Presenting the proposal to
Minister of Health, Labour, and Welfare
Norihiro Tamura**

Proposal of “New Strategies to Become a Country Chosen for Immigration” JCIE, June 2021

Move beyond the unproductive debate over “migrants”

1. Clarify guidelines to encourage active participation

- **Enact a Resident Foreign National Basic Law to form a legal basis** for the Comprehensive Measures
- Create a shared certification system for overseas professional qualifications

2. Support system based on life plans and career paths

- Continuous support and a career path perspective
- Increase employability
- Implement KPIs for achieving goals and show consideration to individuals
- Build a regional platform for achieving goals

3. Realization of Society of Harmonious Coexistence

- “Globalization of the mind”
- Widespread adoption of “yasashii Nihongo” (simple/plain Japanese)

4. Integration of Technical Intern and Specified Skilled Worker Systems

- The systems should be refined
- Establish a new system fitting the actual situation, a “Foreign Youth Training and Work System”

Characteristics: Two courses which foreign nationals can choose between, training or working/permanent residency

Training and numerical evaluation for companies

→ Becomes an appealing system that attracts talented foreign nationals

5. Measures to implement soon

- Establish a Resident Foreign National Policy Committee as an advisory body
- Show consideration for growing foreign national communities, developing the awareness of Japanese nationals, and move forward with comprehensive initiatives

6. Debate visions for the future of Japan

- Perspective to allow foreign nationals potential to blossom
- Create a win-win relationship of mutual enlightenment and growth for both Japanese nationals and foreign nationals
- Have a national debate on visions for the future of Japan

Reference Materials

Imin ga michibiku Nihon no mirai—Posuto korona to jinkougekigen jidai no shohousen
(Japan's future guided by immigrants—Prescription for the post-corona and dramatic population decline era)
(Akashi Shoten, August 2020)

Genkai kokka—Jinkougenshou de Nihon ga semerareru saishuu sentaku
(Country on the brink—Final decision forced on Japan by population decline)
(Asahi Shinsho, 2017)

Jichitai ga hiraku Nihon no iminseisaku—Jinkougenshou jidai no tabunkakyousei e no chousen
(Local governments lead Japan's immigration policy—Challenge of multicultural coexistence in the age of Population decline)
(Akashi Shoten, 2016)

