

As Foreign Hiring Grows, Japanese Paperwork Remains a Major Hurdle

日本の人手不足を背景に、外国人労働者への需要が高まっています。行政手続きに使われる日本語の難しさは、外国人労働者にとって大きな壁となっています。企業による支援の動きも広がりつつありますが、こうした取り組みは本当に十分と言えるでしょうか。もしあなたが外国で働く立場だったら、どのような支援を求めますか。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

Amid a severe labor shortage, demand for foreign workers in Japan is rising. At the same time, language barriers, especially limited Japanese proficiency, are making it increasingly difficult for many foreign workers to complete social security-related paperwork and other administrative procedures.

Processes such as year-end tax adjustments (nenmatsu chosei), final income tax returns (kakutei shinkoku), and medical expense deductions are particularly challenging. Explanations written in complex Japanese are often hard to understand, leaving some workers anxious that they may be missing important information or being taken advantage of.

In response, some companies have begun offering in-house support services to help foreign employees navigate these procedures with greater confidence.

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Japan Forward

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1. Article

"When I started working in Japan, I was given various documents, but I couldn't understand what they said," recalls a 25-year-old Brazilian man. "I was worried about signing something without knowing its contents, and I didn't know what to do." He has worked as a temporary employee at a manufacturing-related company in Osaka for the past three years.

At the time, he spoke no Japanese at all, and the documents were filled with technical terms. Reading and completing them felt overwhelming. "If I signed documents without fully understanding them, I might end up agreeing to unfavorable terms. Even using AI translation tools wasn't enough. They weren't accurate all the time, and I still felt uneasy," he said.

Later, he received a postcard reminding him to submit the documents, but it too was written entirely in Japanese, leaving him unable to understand what was required.

He came to Japan with the long-term goal of starting an IT company. Compared with other countries, Japan seemed more technologically advanced and offered higher wages. Yet despite these advantages, he repeatedly encountered difficulties because he could not understand the paperwork he was required to complete.

"I know that studying Japanese is necessary to work in Japan," he said. "But if materials were available in English, things would be much easier."

According to a 2024 survey by the labor ministry, the most common level of Japanese proficiency among foreign workers, at 24.6 percent, was "able to participate in short conversations about everyday matters."

This was followed by "able to converse freely on a wide range of topics" at 17.6% and "able to converse about familiar topics" at 13.9%. Only 1.8% reported that they could "hardly converse at all."

However, documents submitted to public institutions often contain specialized vocabulary that is rarely used in everyday conversation, leaving many foreign workers confused.

The survey also found that common challenges included "not knowing where to seek advice when problems arise" and "being required to have a higher level of Japanese proficiency than was explained beforehand."

In response, initiatives to support foreign workers are gradually expanding.

Continued on next page.

1. Article

Techno Service, a Tokyo-based staffing company primarily serving the manufacturing sector, established a dedicated consultation department in August 2019 to support foreign employees. The department employs about 15 foreign staff members who are fluent in Japanese and well versed in Japan's social security systems. Using English and their native languages, they provide assistance from the pre-employment stage through the post-hiring period.

To date, the department has handled more than 30,000 cases and responds to approximately 200 to 300 phone inquiries per day. Most consultations involve help with administrative paperwork, such as procedures for enrolling in social insurance.

During peak periods, such as year-end tax adjustments and final income tax returns, which many Japanese workers also find challenging, the number of consultations rises sharply, prompting the company to extend its service hours.

A company representative said, "Some employers hesitate to hire foreign workers because they are unsure how to handle issues when they arise. Having a dedicated support department helps lower the barriers for companies considering foreign hires."

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2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. proficiency 熟達度、習熟度

Masa's English listening **proficiency** improved after two months of regular practice.

2. administrative 事務的な、運営上の

Miwa handles **administrative** tasks at the city library.

3. procedure 手続き

Please follow the correct **procedures** for applying for a paid day off.

4. initiative 取り組み、方針

The city office passed an **initiative** to require all pet dogs and cats to have ID tags.

5. consultation 相談、面談

My **consultation** at the career center helped me find a new job that fit me.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What difficulties did a young Brazilian man have as a result of not knowing any Japanese?
2. What kinds of paperwork are especially difficult for many workers? Why?
3. What kind of assistance does Techno Service provide?
4. How could technology help solve the language problems experienced by immigrants to Japan?
5. What kind of support would you want while living in a foreign country?

4. 年末調整、確定申告…難解な日本語の説明に「騙されている？」
働く外国人の壁どこに

深刻な人手不足を背景に外国人労働者のニーズが高まる一方、日本語能力が障壁となり社会保障関連の書類作成や申請の手続きで挫折するケースが増えている。年末調整に確定申告、医療費控除…。難解な日本語での説明は特に分かりにくく、「だまされているのでは」と不安を抱く人もいる。外国人に安心して働いてもらうため、独自のサポートに乗り出す企業もある。

「日本で就業する際に書類をもらったが、内容が分からなかった。安易にサインするのも不安だし、困った」。大阪市内の製造関係の企業で3年前から派遣社員として働くブラジル国籍の男性（25）は当時をこう振り返る。

日本語はまったく話せず、配布された書類には難解な言葉が並ぶ。読解して記入するには高いハーダルを感じた。「書類の理解が十分でないままサインすれば、不利益な契約を結ぶことになるかもしれない。AI（人工知能）翻訳機を活用しても完璧ではなく不安は大きかった」（男性）。その後、書類の提出を促すはがきが届いたが、これも日本語で書かれており内容は理解できなかった。

日本でIT企業を立ち上げることを目指し来日した男性。日本は他国と比べてテクノロジーが進歩し、給料も高く思えたことが背景にある。こうしたメリットの半面、提出書類一つにしても内容が分からず、壁にぶちあたり続けた。「日本で働くために日本語の勉強は必要だとは思う」と男性。一方、「英語に翻訳された資料があれば、もう少し楽になるのに」とこぼす。

厚生労働省の令和6年外国人雇用実態調査によると、外国人労働者の日本語能力は「日常的なことなら短い会話に参加できる」が最多の24・6%。「幅広い話題について自由に会話できる」（17・6%）、「身近な話題についての会話はできる」（13・9%）が続いた。「会話はほとんどできない」は1・8%だった。しかし公的機関への提出書類には、日常会話では使わない単語も並ぶため、困惑する外国人は少なくない。

調査では外国人労働者が就労する上で困ったこととして「トラブルをどこに相談すればよいか分からなかった」「事前の説明以上に高い日本語能力を求められた」といった回答も目立った。

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4. 年末調整、確定申告…難解な日本語の説明に「騙されている？」 働く外国人の壁どこに

こうした問題を背景に、外国人労働者の就労を支援する取り組みも広がる。

製造業を中心に人材派遣を行う「テクノ・サービス」（東京）では、外国籍の就労スタッフからの相談を受け付ける専門部署を令和元年8月に立ち上げた。日本語にたけ、社会保障にも詳しい外国人の社員約15人が在籍。英語や母国語を使って、就労前から就業後に至るまでの相談を幅広く受け付けている。対応件数は延べ約3万件を超え、1日約200～300件の電話に対応しているという。

寄せられる相談内容は主に、社会保険などに必要な手続き書類の作成など。日本人でも手続きにつまずきやすい年末調整や確定申告といった書類の提出時期には相談が殺到し、受付時間を拡大して相談に乗る。

同社の担当者は「いざというときの対応に不安を抱き、外国人雇用に踏み出せない企業もある。サポート部署があることは、派遣先の企業が外国人を雇用するハードルを下げることにもつながる」と語った。



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