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The Japan Times

Japan sees record high number of foreign residents: Justice Ministry

The number of foreign residents in Japan reached an all-time high last year, the Justice Ministry reported Friday.

There were 2.23 million long-term and permanent foreign residents in Japan as of the end of last year, up 5.2 percent from 2.12 million people at the end of 2014, according to the ministry.

It was the highest number since the ministry began keeping data in 1959.

The largest group by nationality was Chinese, with 665,847 people, accounting for almost 30 percent of foreign residents in Japan, followed by 457,772 South Koreans and 229,595 Filipinos.

An immigration bureau official said the surge in foreign resident populations is linked to a government campaign to draw more foreign visitors, as well as signs of economic recovery.

“The number of foreign visitors in Japan increased dramatically last year . . . At the same time, we also have an increasing number of foreign residents” who intend to stay in the country for business or study, the official said.

The number of visitors from overseas reached a record 19.73 million people last year, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

Meanwhile, the number of residents who had overstayed their visas has also increased.

The ministry reported that there were 62,818 foreign nationals overstaying their visas as of Jan. 1, up 4.7 percent from the same date last year.

This marks the second year the figure has risen. Last year’s increase was the first in more than two decades, and the trend comes despite recent efforts by the ministry to crack down on overstayers.

Among overstayers, South Koreans were the biggest group with 13,412 people, followed by Chinese with 8,741, and Thais with 5,959. The largest increase was among Indonesian overstayers, with a 77.1 percent surge year on year. The country ranked seventh among overstayers overall, with 2,228 people.

The official said this resulted from a jump in visa waivers to Indonesian tourists in December 2014. In 2013, before visa requirements were eased, only 113 Indonesians overstayed their visas. The number increased slightly to 164 in 2014, but spiked almost tenfold in 2015 to 1,200 people.

By visa type, short-term visitors — mostly tourists — were the biggest group with 42,478 people. But a significant surge was seen among people arriving as interns for the government’s foreign trainee program: 5,904 such people were found to be overstayers, a rise of 26.2 percent from last year.

The official said the result reflects the recent trend of an uptick in the number of foreign trainees fleeing workplaces, which hit a record 5,803 in 2015.

The foreign trainee program has been often criticized for the harsh labor conditions of foreign interns, who are often forced to work overtime, and for extremely low wages.

The ministry also said 3,063 illegal immigrants have been served deportation orders as of Jan. 1, of which 1,406 people were applying for refugee status.



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Japan marks fifth anniversary of devastating 3/11 disasters

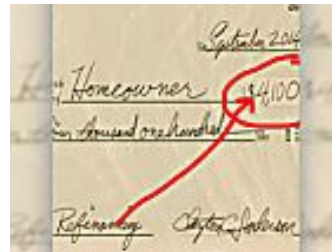
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