

News

Estimated Unionization Rate at Record Low of 16.1% for Third Consecutive Year: Results of MHLW’s “Basic Survey on Labor Unions” in 2024

The estimated unionization rate—the percentage of union members to all employees in Japan—fell to 16.1%, renewing the record low from the previous year, according to the results of the 2024 “Basic Survey on Labour Unions” by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). This marks the third consecutive year the rate has hit a new historic low. The number of labor union members also declined by 25,000 compared to the previous year, totaling 9.912 million, while the number of female and part-time labor union members increased.

I. Continued decline in union membership

According to the survey results, the number of “single labor union” (*tan’itsu rodo kumiai*)¹ decreased by 276 unions (1.2%) from the previous year to 22,513 unions. This marks the 25th consecutive year of decline, dating back to 2000. The number of labor union members stood at 9.912 million in 2024, a decrease of 25,000 (0.3%) year-on-year. Membership once recovered to the 10-million mark in 2018 but began to decline in 2021, dropping below 10 million again in 2022. The downward trend has not been reversed since.

II. Female labor union members increased by 32,000, reaching 3.506 million

In addition to these trends in union membership, the number of employed persons (based on the raw figures of June from the *Labour Force Survey* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications)) increased by 300,000 year-on-year to 61.39 million.

As a result, the estimated unionization rate in 2024 declined by 0.2 percentage points from 16.3% to 16.1%, marking the lowest level since the survey began in 1947. The rate gradually declined for nine consecutive years from 18.5% in 2010, once briefly rebounded to 17.1% in 2020, began falling again from 2021, and continued to decline further. Meanwhile, the number of female labor union members stood at 3.506 million, an increase of 32,000 (0.9%) compared to the previous year. The estimated unionization rate among them—the proportion of female labor union members to all female employees in Japan—was 12.4% in 2024, unchanged from the previous year.

III. Part-time worker union membership also rises by 53,000 to 1.463 million

The number of part-time labor union members rose by 53,000 (3.8%) to 1.463 million in 2024, compared to 1.41 million in the previous year. Their share of total union membership increased by 0.6 percentage points to 14.9%, up from 14.3% the year before. The estimated unionization rate among part-time workers rose by 0.4 points to 8.8%, compared to 8.4% in the previous year (Table 1).

IV. Decline in union membership in public and transport sectors

By industry, the highest number of union members was in manufacturing (2.615 million persons; 26.5% of the total), followed by wholesale and retail trade (1.56 million; 15.8%), construction

Table 1. Number of part-time workers in labor union members and estimated unionization rate (Unit labor unions): 2020–2024

Year	Number of union members who are part-time workers ¹			Proportion of total union membership	Number of employees ²	Estimated unionization rate ³
	1,000 persons	Change from previous year	Year-on-year change rate			
	1,000 persons	1,000 persons	%	%	10,000 persons	%
2020	1,375 (1,041)	42 (34)	3.1 (3.3)	13.7 (30.4)	1,578 (1,153)	8.7 (9.0)
2021	1,363 (1,040)	-12 (-1)	-0.8 (-0.1)	13.6 (30.1)	1,628 (1,213)	8.4 (8.6)
2022	1,404 (1,059)	41 (19)	3.0 (1.8)	14.1 (30.6)	1,653 (1,221)	8.5 (8.7)
2023	1,410 (1,047)	6 (-12)	0.4 (-1.1)	14.3 (30.2)	1,671 (1,231)	8.4 (8.5)
2024	1,463 (1,090)	53 (-43)	3.8 (4.1)	14.9 (31.2)	1,667 (1,219)	8.8 (8.9)

Source: MHLW, “Reiwa 6 nen, Rodo kumiai kiso chosa no gaikyo” [Overview of the 2024 Basic Survey on Labor Unions], 4.
Notes: Values in parentheses indicate figures for women.

1. “Part-time workers” are workers who meet either of the following conditions: (a) their scheduled working hours per day are shorter than those of ordinary workers; (b) their scheduled working hours per day are the same as those of ordinary workers, but their number of scheduled working days per week is fewer. “Full-time employees” are regular employees who do not fall under the category of *pato* or part-time workers.

2. “Number of employees” is based on the raw figures from the *Labour Force Survey* (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) for June of each respective year. It includes the number of employees working less than 35 hours per week excluding those classified as “regular staff/employees” by employment type, plus the number of employees working 35 hours or more per week who are referred to as “*pato*” at their workplace (i.e., so-called “full-time part-timers”).

3. “Estimated unionization rate” is calculated by dividing the number of union members who are part-time workers by the “number of employees.”

(839,000; 8.5%), and transport and postal activities (802,000; 8.1%). Industries with the large year-on-year increases in union membership were accommodation, eating and drinking services (+29,000 persons; +8.6%) and wholesale and retail trade (+19,000; +1.2%). On the other hand, declines were particularly seen in government (except elsewhere classified) (−16,000; −2.2%), transport and postal activities (−12,000; −1.4%), education, learning support (−10,000; −2.4%), and manufacturing (−10,000; −0.4%).

V. Two-thirds of union members belong to firms with 1,000 or more employees

In the private sector, the number of union members was 8.695 million in 2024, a slight increase

of 3,000 from the previous year. By firm size, 5.875 million (67.6% of the total) belonged to firms with 1,000 or more employees—representing over two-thirds of all private-sector union members. This was followed by 1.08 million persons (12.4%) in firms with 300–999 employees, 533,000 persons (6.1%) in firms with 100–299 employees, 162,000 persons (1.9%) in firms with 30–99 employees, and 21,000 persons (0.2%) in firms with fewer than 30 employees.

Compared to the previous year, union membership at firms with 1,000 or more employees increased by 29,000 persons (0.5%), while that of all other categories declined. The steepest drop was in firms with 30–99 employees, which saw a decrease of 5,000 persons (−2.8%).

VI. Three national centers of trade unions saw declines in union membership

Among three national centers of trade unions in Japan, the number of union members was 6.813 million at Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), 451,000 at Zenroren (National Confederation of Trade Unions), and 73,000 at Zenrokyo (National Trade Union Council)—all down from the previous year by 5,000, 13,000, and 3,000 persons, respectively.

Looking at industrial trade unions, Rengo affiliates that saw increases in membership included the Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service, and General Worker's Unions (+42,000 to 1.936 million), Federation of All Japan Foods and Tobacco Workers' Unions (+3,000 to 116,000), and Japan Federation of Aviation Industry Unions (+2,000 to 46,000). In contrast, significant declines were seen in Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions (-18,000 to 781,000), and All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union, (-11,000 to 706,000), with further decreases at Japan Postal Group Union (-6,000 to 221,000), the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan (-5,000 to 196,000), the Federation of Information and Communication Technology Service Workers of Japan (-5,000 to 189,000), and Japan Teachers' Union (-4,000 to 196,000). Among Zenroren affiliates, membership also declined at Japan Federation of Prefectural and Municipal Workers' Union (-4,000 to 115,000), Japan Federation of Medical Worker's Unions (-3,000 to 142,000), and Japan Federation of Public Service Employees' Union (-3,000 to 47,000).

VII. Rengo expresses strong concern over the growing number of workers outside collective labor-management protection

On December 18, 2024, Rengo's General Secretary Hideyuki Shimizu issued a statement noting that the falling estimated unionization rate "represents the ongoing increase in workers not covered by collective labor-management relations."

He emphasized the need to take the decline in union membership seriously and treat it as an urgent issue, calling for analysis of the causes, efforts to accurately assess the conditions of majority-based unions—unions composed of more than half of the employees at a workplace—and consideration of revising union constitutions and collective agreements to reexamine membership coverage, all aimed at stemming the ongoing decline in union membership. He also emphasized that Rengo receives around 20,000 labor-related consultations annually, mainly from workers in non-unionized environments. Rengo committed to continuing outreach activities including for freelancers under its banner of "With you, Toward Tomorrow."

VIII. Zenroren: Expanding fighting union ranks is the greatest force for *Shunto* wins

On December 20, Zenroren issued a comment on the survey results, stating that organizing in unorganized sectors such as small- and micro-sized enterprises remains a significant challenge. It stressed that amid rising prices and deepening hardships in workers' lives, its fight during the 2025 *Shunto* (spring labor-management negotiations) would focus on raising wages, expanding allowances, shortening working hours, and protecting workers' rights. General Secretary Koichi Kurosawa declared that the "greatest strength for realizing our demands lies in increasing the ranks of fighting unions."

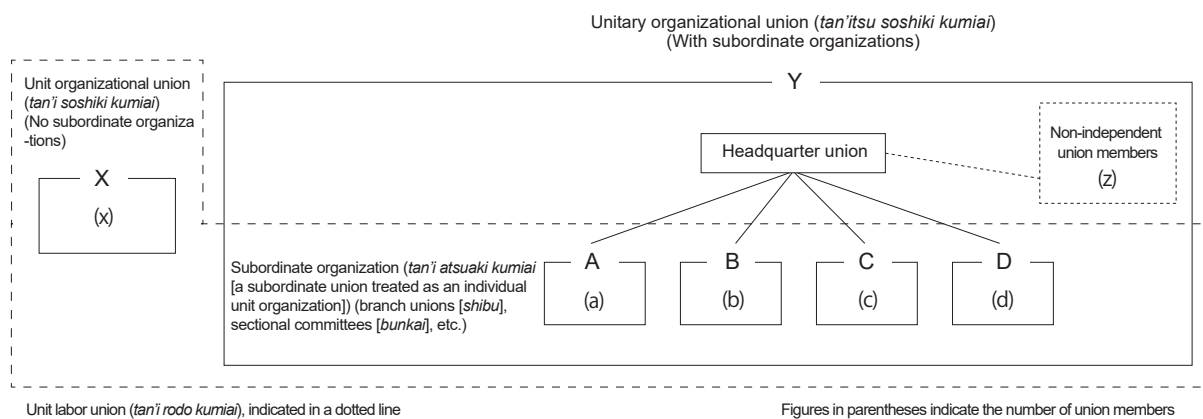
"Basic Survey on Labour Unions" is conducted every July to clarify the actual status of labor union organization including the distribution of labor unions and union members by industry, enterprise size, and affiliation with upper-level organizations. It targets all labor unions, and the status of union members as of the end of June each year.

Note

1. "Single labor union" (*tan'itsu rodo kumiai*) consists of: (1) a "unit organizational union" (*tan'i soshiki kumiai*), which is formed on an individual membership basis without a subordinate organization (*tan'i atsukai kumiai*) [i.e. a subordinate union treated as an individual unit organization], and (2) a "unitary organizational union" (*tan'itsu soshiki kumiai*), which is also formed on an individual membership

basis but has a subordinate organization such as a branch union (*shibu*) or sectional committee (*bunkai*). Note that the number of members in a “single labor union” exceeds that of a “unit labor union” (*tan’i rodo kumiai*) [see the diagram below],

because it includes “non-independent union members”—that is, union members who do not belong to an organization that independently conducts union activities.



Source: MHLW, “Reiwa 6 nen Rodo kumiai kiso chosa no gaikyo” [Overview of the 2024 Basic Survey on Labor Unions], “Yogo no teigi” [Definition of statistical terms], 1–2. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/13-23b.html#link01>.