

News

MHLW's Survey Results on “A Comprehensive Review of the Work Style Reform Act Five Years After Its Enforcement”

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) conducted a workers' questionnaire survey (“2025 Survey on Workers' Preferences and Perceptions Regarding Working Hours, Etc.”) as well as an interview survey targeting companies and employees. The objective of the surveys was to assess the situation five years after the enforcement of the “Act on the Arrangement of Related Acts to Promote Work Style Reform,” also known as the “Work Style Reform Act,” (see Note below) which took effect in 2019. The results of the surveys were released on March 5, 2026. According to the results of the questionnaire survey, about 30% of workers indicated that they want to reduce their working hours, with over 60% of the respondents cited “having more personal time for themselves” as the reason. Regarding the number of hours worked, which exceeds the prescribed working hours (i.e., combined hours of overtime work and work on days off), over 60% of workers considered 20 hours or less to be appropriate.

These surveys were conducted in accordance with the “Grand Design and Action Plan for a New Form of Capitalism 2025 Revised Version,” which was approved by the Cabinet in June 2025, stating that “a comprehensive review shall be conducted five years after the enforcement of the Work Style Reform Act, and the Labor Policy Council shall consider amendments to labor standard legislation based on the actual working conditions and needs.” In October 2025, a questionnaire survey was conducted among workers who were monitors registered with an online research company (allocated by prefecture). A total of 3,000 valid responses were

collected. From October to December in 2025, an interview survey was conducted with 327 companies as well as 97 employees from some of the participating companies.

I. Results of the questionnaire survey

About 40% of workers with scheduled working hours of “40 hours or more” per week indicated that their working hours were long

According to the results of the questionnaire survey of workers, regarding how they perceive the length of their working hours, the responses were as follows: “long” (7.9%), “somewhat long” (18.4%), “just right” (59.7%), “somewhat short” (7.3%), and “short” (6.6%).

When examining these results by scheduled weekly working hours, the percentages of workers who responded “long” and “somewhat long” were as follows: in the “40 hours or more” per week category (15.4% and 23.0%, respectively), and “35 hours or more but less than 40 hours” (7.2% and 21.5%, respectively). The results indicated that the percentages were particularly high among workers with 35 hours or more per week.

When analyzing the results by the average actual working hours per week—that is, the average number of hours worked in a week, including scheduled working hours, overtime, and work on days off—the percentages of those who responded “long” and “somewhat long” were as follows: those working “40 hours or more but less than 50 hours” (7.9% and 24.4%, respectively), “50 hours or more but less than 60 hours” (22.1% and 34.1%, respectively), “60

hours or more but less than 70 hours” (38.6% and 17.5%, respectively), and “70 hours or more” (42.3% and 9.6%, respectively). Among respondents with working hours exceeding 50 hours, over half indicated that their working hours were long.

The highest proportion of workers wanting to reduce their working hours was among those in the “Scientific Research, Professional and Technical Services” sector

Regarding workers’ preferences for changes to

their current working hours, respondents indicated the following preferences: “reduce” (11.7%), “slightly reduce” (18.2%), and were “satisfied with the status quo” (59.5%). This indicates that about 30% of respondents, in total, want to either “reduce” or “slightly reduce” their working hours. Meanwhile, 7.3% of respondents indicated that they want to “slightly increase,” and 3.2% stated that they want to “increase.”

The table below presents the percentages of respondents who want to “reduce,” segmented by

Table. Workers’ preferences regarding increases or reductions in working hours by industry

	Number of responding companies	Workers' preferences regarding increases or reductions in working hours (unit: %)				
		Want to reduce	Want to slightly reduce	Satisfied with the status quo	Want to slightly increase	Want to increase
Total number of workers	3,000	11.7	18.2	59.5	7.3	3.2
Agriculture	28	10.7	10.7	53.6	17.9	7.1
Forestry	7	0.0	14.3	42.9	42.9	0.0
Fisheries	3	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0
Mining and quarrying of stone and gravel	5	0.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	40.0
Construction	163	9.2	20.2	63.2	6.1	1.2
Manufacturing	633	10.9	19.7	58.5	7.1	3.8
Electricity, Gas, Heat supply, and Water	46	15.2	10.9	69.6	4.3	0.0
Information and Communications	156	17.9	19.9	54.5	5.8	1.9
Transport and Postal services	134	13.4	16.4	59.7	6.7	3.7
Wholesale and Retail trade	323	7.7	16.7	64.7	6.2	4.6
Finance and Insurance	90	12.2	22.2	61.1	3.3	1.1
Real estate; Goods rental and leasing	55	16.4	16.4	56.4	10.9	0.0
Scientific research, Professional and technical services	46	19.6	17.4	56.5	4.3	2.2
Accommodations, Eating and drinking services	106	11.3	9.4	61.3	15.1	2.8
Living-related and personal services, and Amusement services	73	11.0	17.8	61.6	4.1	5.5
Education, learning support	118	14.4	20.3	56.8	6.8	1.7
Medical, health care and welfare	400	14.3	22.3	53.8	6.8	3.0
Compound services (including post offices and cooperative associations, etc.)	27	11.1	18.5	70.4	0.0	0.0
Services, N.E.C. (Not Elsewhere Classified)	303	10.9	14.9	64.0	8.9	1.3
Government, N.E.C.	152	13.2	21.1	57.9	5.9	2.0
Industries unable to classify	132	6.1	12.1	60.6	11.4	9.8

Source: Compiled based on the MHLW's Survey Results on “A Comprehensive Review of the Work Style Reform Act Five Years After Its Enforcement” (in Japanese).

Note: Please note that the sample sizes for each industry are limited.

industry. The “Scientific research, Professional and technical services” sector had the highest proportion at 19.6%, followed by the “Information and Communications” (17.9%), the “Real estate, Goods rental and leasing” (16.4%), and the “Electricity, Gas, Heat supply, and Water” (15.2%).

More than 30% of workers with scheduled working hours of “35 hours or more” per week, as well as over 50% of those with average actual working hours of “50 hours or more” per week hoped for a reduction in working hours

When examining workers’ preferences regarding increases or reductions in their current working hours by scheduled weekly working hours, the proportions of those who want to “reduce” and “slightly reduce” their working hours were particularly higher among those working “40 hours or more” (19.8% and 20.2%, respectively) and “35 hours or more but less than 40 hours” (12.6% and 21.6%, respectively). In these two categories, more than 30% of workers indicated a preference to reduce their working hours. Meanwhile, the percentages of workers who want to “increase” or “slightly increase” their working hours remained below 10% in each category, regardless of the length of their scheduled working hours.

When examining the results by average actual working hours per week, the responses were as follows: those working “50 hours or more but less than 60 hours” answered “reduce” (24.8%) and “slightly reduce” (28.8%), while those working “60 hours or more but less than 70 hours” (35.1% and 26.3%, respectively), and “70 hours or more” (42.3% and 13.5%, respectively). In each category, the proportion of respondents who want to reduce their working hours exceeded 50%. Nevertheless, even in the time categories where a relatively high proportion of respondents who want to “increase” or “slightly increase,” the percentages were as follows: those working “20 hours or more but less than 30 hours” (4.8% and 10.6%, respectively), and “10 hours or more but less than 20 hours” (4.3% and 10.4%, respectively). The proportion of respondents who indicated that they want to increase remained around 15%.

When examining these results by hours of overtime work per month (average of the last three months), the proportions of respondents who want to “reduce” and “slightly reduce” were higher than 30% in the time categories exceeding 10 hours.

Half of the workers who do not receive overtime pay hoped for a reduction in working hours

When examining the data by overtime pay status, among those receiving “full overtime pay,” the combined proportion of workers who want to “reduce” or “slightly reduce” their working hours remained in the low 20% range (9.2% and 15.1%, respectively). In contrast, among those receiving “partial overtime pay” (“reduce” 16.4% and “slightly reduce” 31.9%), “mostly not paid” (“reduce” 14.9% and “slightly reduce” 30.7%), and “not paid at all” (“reduce” 26.9% and “slightly reduce” 25.7%), with all categories falling within the 40% to 50% range.

When analyzing the data based on whether or not workers have a secondary or side job, among those who “do not have a secondary or side job,” the combined proportion of workers who want to “reduce” (12.0%) or “slightly reduce” (17.1%) their working hours was just under 30%. In contrast, the percentages of those who “have a secondary or side job at a company affiliated with their main job” (“reduce” 10.4%, and “slightly reduce” 27.0%) and “have a secondary or side job at a company not affiliated with their main job” (“reduce” 9.3%, and “slightly reduce” 27.3%) were both slightly higher, with each exceeding 30%.

The most frequent reasons that workers cited for hoping to increase their working hours included wanting to “earn more” or “work at their own pace”

When workers who responded that they want to “reduce” or “slightly reduce” their working hours were asked the reason (multiple answers), the most commonly cited reason was wanting to “have more personal time for myself,” which accounted for 66.7% of the responses. The remaining common reasons were “protecting my health” (39.6%) and “because working long hours is not worth the pay” (30.0%).

Conversely, among workers who responded that they want to “increase” or “slightly increase” their working hours (multiple answers), those who want to “earn more money”—excluding respondents who indicated that “their household budget is tight without income from work beyond scheduled working hours (overtime pay)”—stood out at 41.6%, followed by those who want to “work at my own pace” at 19.7%, and “my household budget is tight without income from work beyond scheduled working hours (overtime pay)” at 15.6%, among others.

Among workers who responded that they were “satisfied with the status quo” in terms of their working hours (multiple answers), the highest-ranked reasons included wanting to “avoid a change to my work-life balance” (44.3%) and wanting to “maintain existing income” (32.0%).

In addition, when examining the number of overtime hours per month that was considered appropriate, the responses were as follows: “zero hours” (21.7%), “zero hours or more but less than 10 hours” (28.8%), “10 hours or more but less than 20 hours” (15.1%), “20 hours or more but less than 30 hours” (10.5%), “30 hours or more but less than 40 hours” (9.4%), and “40 hours or more but less than 45 hours” (7.5%). The proportion of workers who consider 20 hours or less to be appropriate exceeded 60%, while the proportion of those who consider 45 hours or less to be appropriate exceeded 90%.

II. Results of the interview survey

Companies hoping to reduce working hours cited reasons such as “ensuring employees’ recruitment and retention”

According to the results of the interview survey conducted with 327 companies, regarding their views on the current status of working hours, 201 companies responded that they prefer to “maintain the status quo,” while 73 companies want to “reduce” them, and 53 companies want to “increase” them.

Among the reasons companies indicated for preferring to “maintain the status quo” (multiple answers), the most frequent ones—given by 178 companies—were related to the “current workload,”

such as “high employee satisfaction with the current working hours.” Other leading reasons included “safeguarding employees’ health and work-life balance” (22 companies) and “ensuring employees’ recruitment and retention” (20 companies).

Among the reasons companies indicated for hoping to “reduce” working hours (multiple answers), 22 companies cited reasons related to “ensuring employees’ recruitment and retention,” such as “long working hours make it difficult to retain young employees and those with families.” Other leading reasons included “safeguarding employees’ health and work-life balance” (18 companies) and “reducing labor costs” (nine companies).

Half of the companies hoping to increase working hours aimed to do so within the upper limits set by regulations

Meanwhile, among the reasons that companies indicated for hoping to “increase” working hours, the most frequently cited reason—mentioned by 29 companies—was related to the “nature of work,” such as “in the event of work delays or schedule changes due to weather conditions.” Other commonly cited reasons included “needs to increase the volume of orders” (nine companies), “responding to requests from employees” (nine companies), “due to labor shortages” (seven companies), and “aiming to improve the quality of work and technical skills” (five companies).

Among 53 companies that indicated an intention to “increase” working hours, 25 companies hoped to do so within the limits of the current regulations (e.g., 100 hours per month, an average of 80 hours over multiple months, or 720 hours per year). Meanwhile, 17 companies hoped to exceed these limits, and 11 companies hoped to exceed the standard of 45 hours per month and six times per year, which is the principle of the special provisions of the “Agreement on Overtime and Holiday Work” (known as an “Article 36 Agreement” or *saburoku kyotei*).

In response to the question regarding whether their employees had requested an “increase in their working hours,” 140 out of 327 companies reported

that such requests had been made, while 187 companies responded that they had not.

70% of the interviewed employees indicated a preference for “maintaining the current” working hours

According to the results of the interview survey of 97 employees, when asked about their current working hours, 70 employees responded that they prefer to “maintain the status quo,” 14 employees indicated a preference to “reduce” their working hours, and 13 employees indicated a preference to “increase” their working hours.

Among employees responded that they prefer to “maintain the status quo” (multiple answers), the most frequently cited reason was related to having “no dissatisfaction with the current situation” (59 employees). Other reasons cited included: “I would prefer not to extend my working hours to the point of doing overtime” and “working any harder than I do now is physically demanding.” Among employees indicated that they want to “reduce” their working hours, the primary reason cited was “work-life balance” (nine employees).

Meanwhile, among employees responded they prefer to “increase” their working hours (multiple answers), the most frequently cited reason was related to “income” (nine employees), such as “I

want to work more and earn more during busy periods.” Other relatively common reasons were related to “workload” (four employees) or “training junior staff” (three employees).

Among 13 employees who responded that they want to “increase” their working hours, nine employees stated they want to increase within the limits of the current regulations (e.g., 100 hours per month, an average of 80 hours over multiple months, 720 hours per year). In addition, three employees indicated their preference to exceed these upper limits, while one employee indicated a preference to exceed the standard of 45 hours per month and six times per year, which aligns with the principle of the special provisions of the “Agreement on Overtime and Holiday Work.”

Note

The Work Style Reform Act is a comprehensive legislative amendment package, which includes eight laws, such as the Labor Standards Act and the Industrial Safety and Health Act. These amendments have been implemented in stages since 2019. This set of amendments comprises of three key pillars: the rectification of long working hours, the realization of diverse and flexible working styles, and the assurance of fair treatment regardless of employment status. Regarding the rectification of long working hours, the upper limit for overtime is generally set at 45 hours per month and 360 hours per year. In cases where there are temporary special circumstances and both labor and management agree, the limit is set at 720 hours per year.