



Global Migration and Japan's Framework for Ethical Recruitment
(*Migrasi Global dan Rangka Kerja Pengambilan Beretika Jepun*)

Saeko Noda¹, Hinako Eba², *Choo Chin Low³,

¹ Nihon Fukushi University/Hitonomori Co., Ltd.

² Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Malaysia Office

³ School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia

*Corresponding author: lowc@usm.my

ABSTRACT

The research aims to analyse Japan's experience towards fair migration and ethical recruitment in the context of global migration challenges. The United Nations has implemented a variety of global initiatives that acknowledge the significance of fair migration in the prevention of debt bondage, exploitation, and forced labour. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is crucial for the effective management of global migration. SDG 10 emphasises the reduction of disparities between and within nations, and Target 10.7 is specifically designed to facilitate responsible, safe, and orderly migration. One of the indicators of safe migration is the payment of recruitment costs by employers rather than foreign labourers (Indicator 10.7.1). This paper examines the programmes of the Japanese government, remediation of recruitment fees by companies in Japan, and bilateral efforts by JICA (and its related association: JP-MIRAI) in safeguarding migrant rights and achieving zero-cost migration. A new program called Ikusei Shūrō (Training and Employment) will be introduced to address issues of ethical recruitment in transnational labour migration, along with initiatives by socially responsible companies. The findings suggest that Ikusei Shūrō program includes measures to improve conditions for ethical recruitment, but its actual implementation is still awaited. In addition, business communities, such as Responsible Business Alliance member companies, have begun taking concrete steps toward the ethical recruitment of migrant workers including the prohibition of worker-paid recruitment fees yet full implementation throughout the lower tiers of the industrial supply chain remains to be achieved.

Keywords: ethical recruitment; fair migration; foreign worker; Japan; SDG 10



ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengalaman Jepun ke arah migrasi yang adil dan pengambilan beretika dalam konteks cabaran migrasi global. Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu telah melaksanakan pelbagai inisiatif global yang mengiktiraf kepentingan migrasi yang adil dalam mencegah perhambaan hutang, eksploitasi, dan buruh paksa. Agenda 2030 untuk Pembangunan Mampan adalah penting untuk pengurusan migrasi global yang berkesan. SDG 10 menekankan pengurangan jurang antara dan dalam negara, dan Sasaran 10.7 direka khusus untuk memudahkan migrasi yang bertanggungjawab, selamat dan teratur. Salah satu petunjuk migrasi yang selamat ialah pembayaran kos pengrekrutan oleh majikan bukannya buruh asing (Petunjuk 10.7.1). Kertas ini mengkaji inisiatif kerajaan Jepun, pembayaran balik yuran pengrekrutan oleh syarikat-syarikat di Jepun, dan usaha dua hala oleh JICA dalam melindungi hak migran dan mencapai migrasi sifar kos. Program baharu yang dipanggil Ikusei Shūrō (Latihan dan Pekerjaan) akan diperkenalkan untuk menangani isu pengambilan pekerja yang beretika dalam migrasi buruh merentas negara, bersama dengan inisiatif oleh syarikat yang mengamalkan tanggungjawab sosial. Hasil kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa program Ikusei Shūrō mengambil kira langkah-langkah ke arah pengambilan beretika, tetapi pelaksanaan sebenarnya masih ditunggu. Selain itu, komuniti perniagaan, seperti syarikat-syarikat anggota Responsible Business Alliance, telah mula mengambil langkah konkrit ke arah pengambilan pekerja migran secara beretika termasuk larangan kos pengrekrutan yang dibayar oleh pekerja namun pelaksanaan sepenuhnya di peringkat sistem rantai bekalan industri masih belum dicapai.

Kata kunci: pengambilan beretika; migrasi yang adil; pekerja asing; Jepun; SDG 10

INTRODUCTION

Globally, many attempts have been undertaken to institutionalise the rights of migrant workers into global governance, including the UN Global Compact on Migration, migration-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the International Labour Organization's 'Fair Recruitment Initiatives' (Jones 2022; Likić-Brborić 2018). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 with the objective of enhancing migrant rights, international cooperation, and migration governance. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) is the inaugural global



migration agreement, comprising twenty-three objectives (McAdam 2019). The GCM, or the architecture of global migration governance has two objectives: the first is to facilitate the movement of migrants and empower them, while the second is to monitor their mobility (Pécoud 2021). Significant commitments include the promotion of ethical recruitment, the reduction of vulnerabilities, the encouragement of respectable employment for migrants, and the preservation of lives (Solomon and Sheldon 2018). Objective 6 of the GCM aims to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work (United Nations 2019). Action measures designed to safeguard migrant workers from various forms of exploitation include the regulation of public and private recruiting agencies, as well as the prohibition of recruiters and employers from imposing migration charges on migrant workers (McAdam 2019).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is crucial for the effective management of global migration. The SDGs bolster the rights of migrant workers by promoting universal human rights instruments, social protection, and dignified work in certain migration-related objectives (Likić-Brborić 2018). Lowering migration costs and eliminating workers-pay fees adhere to SDG Target 10.7 concerning facilitating orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration. One of the indicators of safe migration is the assumption of recruitment costs by employers rather than labourers (Indicator 10.7.1). The facilitation of orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration is in accordance with SDG target 10.7, which is achieved by reducing migration costs and eradicating workers' pay fees. The recruitment cost endured by the employee as a proportion of the yearly income earned in the country of destination is the definition of SDG indicator 10.7.1. The SDG Target 8.8 recognises the importance of protecting labor rights and promoting safe working environments for all workers. In particular, Target 8.7 calls for the abolition of forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labour, while Target 8.8 demands the preservation of labour rights and the promotion of secure working environments (Rotaecche 2019; United Nations 2015).

This research seeks to answer two questions: How does the Japanese government ensure ethical recruitment? What are the bilateral efforts conducted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (or its related association: JP-MIRAI) to ensure fair recruitment? Ethical recruitment is defined as a 'process for hiring workers lawfully and fairly and transparently that respects their dignity and human rights' (Verité 2021: 2–3). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) report, titled "Fair Migration: Setting an ILO Agenda", asserts that fair migration must uphold the basic rights of migrants and provide them chances for dignified employment (2014: 4). A rights-based approach to migration governance is crucial in combating labour exploitation and abuses of basic rights resulting from inadequate protection measures and flawed migration systems (2014: 23). Fair migration is indicative of a fundamental switch in the conceptualisation of the labour migration industry, from a business model to a rights protection model. The state endeavoured to eliminate the business aspect of the industry by instituting zero-cost memoranda of understanding (MoUs), implementing direct employment through digitalisation, and introducing joint liability schemes for employers and private employment agencies. Under the MoUs, the long-standing practice of labourers



covering migration costs has been replaced by the zero-cost migration regime (Low 2025). National governance dictates the operation of a nation's migration management systems. Effective international labour migration governance requires cohesive institutional systems endorsed by national governments. These frameworks should prioritise the establishment of fair and competitive labour mobility that advantages host nations, destination countries, and migrants (Hamada 2012).

This paper focuses on policy interventions for fair migration and zero-cost recruitment based on the case study of Japan. This paper firstly discusses the global frameworks on ethical recruitment, followed by Japan's new programme on *Ikusei Shūrō* (Training and Employment), remediation of recruitment fees by Japanese companies, and efforts by government related agencies.

ETHICAL RECRUITMENT: THE GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS

This paper is built within the fair recruitment framework established by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) "Fair Recruitment Initiative" and the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) "International Recruitment Integrity System" (IRIS). The ILO established the Fair Recruitment Initiative to define and promote fair recruitment as a coordinated governance mechanism. Fair recruitment is acknowledged as a component of global migration regulation (Jones 2022). In response to the difficulties encountered by low-skilled migrant workers in labour markets, the ILO initiated the "Fair Recruitment Initiative" in 2014 with three objectives: to prevent human trafficking and forced labour, to safeguard workers' rights from exploitative practices during the placement process until their return, and to diminish the costs associated with labour migration while improving developmental outcomes for migrant workers and their families (ILO 2015). The expenses for migrant workers might be much more than those for domestic workers, attributed to a lack of transparency in the global supply chain and varying definitions of recruiting costs (ILO 2019). In 2016, the ILO established the "General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment," applicable to both domestically and internationally recruited workers. The seventh of the thirteen basic principles states, "No recruitment fees or related costs should be charged to, or otherwise borne by, workers or jobseekers" (ILO 2019: 13).

Simultaneously, IOM's IRIS is a worldwide multi-stakeholder program designed to ensure equitable international recruiting for all parties involved, including migrant workers, employers, recruiters, and both countries of origin and destination. IRIS enforces equitable recruitment by the promotion of the Employer-Pays Principle, upholding the rights of migrant workers, increasing openness and accountability in recruitment processes, and fortifying governmental policies, laws, and enforcement mechanisms (IOM 2014). The IRIS Standard aligns with Objective 6 of the UN Global Compact concerning Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. It comprises seven principles (two general and five particular), each of which is



elaborated with indicators to assess labour recruiters' adherence to ethical recruiting standards (IOM 2019).

Unethical recruiting techniques, particularly those imposing exorbitant fees on migrants, exacerbate the dangers of debt bondage, forced labour, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking. This culminates in substantial indebtedness, prompting irregular movement as migrant workers circumvent legal avenues or abandon their low-paying legal employment in pursuit of illicit opportunities inside shadow economies. Excessive borrowing adversely affects both families and the economy of labour-exporting nations that depend on remittances. Consequently, elevated recruiting expenses diminish the influence of migration on development and result in the unequal allocation of its advantages (Institute for Human Rights and Business [IHRB] 2017: 16–17; Wickramasekara & Baruah 2017: 23). A rights-based and socially fair framework for regulating global labour movement requires the removal of the structural function of agents (Jones 2022). At the bilateral level, the principles of zero migration cost and the employer-pays-recruitment model were implemented by the MoU between both the sending and receiving states. The MoU between Malaysia and Nepal, signed in 2018) was an example of zero-cost migration to address forced labour and human trafficking (Low 2020).

An ILO research entitled “The Cost of Coercion” indicates a strong correlation between recruiting expenditures and the likelihood of victimisation by forced labour (ILO 2009: 32). Forced labour include workplace exploitation and abusive recruiting methods that increase workers' susceptibility to exploitation. Debt bondage, or the exploitation of indebtedness, is the primary factor that confines people to circumstances of forced labour (ILO 2009). The activities of recruiting agencies amount to human trafficking if the recruitment of workers involves coercion, abduction, fraud, deceit, abuse of authority, or exploitation of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation, including forced labour (UNODC 2015). The acceptance of underground labour markets and the establishment of temporary migrant worker programs with single-employer sponsorship have led to unethical labour conditions and the exploitation of migrant workers. The lack of legal status and the government's unwillingness to enforce labour laws against unscrupulous employers have resulted in precarious conditions for undocumented workers (Crépeau 2018). High transaction costs are often linked to the first stages of recruitment in Asia and the Pacific. This is exacerbated by the involvement of several agents, subagents, middlemen, travel providers, and bureaucrats in the recruitment process, resulting in additional layers of expenses across various nations. The substantial expenses constitute a significant barrier to the allocation of migration funds for socio-economic development initiatives (Hugo 2009).

Unlike conventional state-centric regulatory measures for recruiting firms, the corporate responsibility of the private sector is becoming more significant. Several worldwide efforts underscore business responsibility, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (1976), and the Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity (2011). The U.N. Guiding Principles, referred to as UNGPs or the Ruggie Principles, are the foremost international



benchmarks for corporate behaviour (Farbenblum & Nolan 2017; Ruggie & Nelson 2015). Individual enterprises are a primary target of changes aimed at equitable recruitment, since those at the upper echelons of the supply chain may enforce compliance among labour recruiters and subcontractors (Farbenblum & Nolan 2017). By monitoring labour law infringements and reducing irregular migration, technology interventions promote fair migration. By facilitating the monitoring of employers with undocumented and absconding foreign workers, as well as wage fraud, they address employers' failure to comply with immigration and labour laws. Employers are encouraged to adhere to legal obligations and employ regular employees by being closely monitored for any violations of migrant rights (Low 2023).

The UN Guiding Principles were ratified by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2011. The paper signifies a significant advancement in the international regulation of human rights norms for multinational corporations. The Ruggie Principles advocate for companies to rectify human rights breaches and facilitate the assessment of corporate human rights performance (Aaronson & Higham 2013). These Guiding Principles are based on Protect, Respect, and Remedy. The principles are complementary: 1) The state is obligated to safeguard against third-party human rights infringements, 2) companies are duty-bound to uphold human rights, and 3) there is a need for enhanced access to remedies (Ruggie 2008). This paper delineates a corporate obligation to uphold human rights, mandating enterprises to avert, mitigate, and rectify human rights infringements associated with their activities (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] 2011a). Moreover, Principle 15 of the UNGP asserts that to meet their corporate responsibilities, corporations must implement policies and processes, including policy commitments, human rights due diligence procedures, and mediation mechanisms. Principle 22 articulates the practical concept of corporate responsibility to provide repair (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] 2011b).

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, established in 1976, signify a notable worldwide endeavour. These guidelines provide governmental advice for firms about responsible business practices. They are the only multilaterally sanctioned corporate codes of conduct, embodying the worldwide consensus established by the participating states (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2001). In light of the evolving international investment environment, the rules were amended in 2011 to include a new chapter on human rights and an innovative due diligence framework. The human rights chapter references the U.N.'s Protect, Respect, and Remedy Framework and recognises that adherence to human rights is the anticipated worldwide responsibility for businesses. The inability of a state to enforce international human rights does not reduce the human rights responsibilities anticipated from corporations (OECD 2011). The updated OECD Guidelines include corporate responsibility for human rights protection in the new human rights chapter and provide a fresh due diligence obligation in the General Policies chapter, so aligning with the U.N. Guiding Principles (Ruggie & Nelson 2015).



The Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity were established in 2011 as a framework for enterprises across all sectors to fulfil their corporate duty in safeguarding the rights of migrant workers (Institute for Human Rights and Business [IHRB] 2017: 4, 10). The Dhaka concepts include two fundamental concepts and 10 additional principles grounded in human rights, applicable to employers and labour recruiters throughout each phase of the migration process. The fundamental principles underscore equitable treatment devoid of discrimination in the workplace and the safeguarding of employment rights in the host nation (Institute for Human Rights and Business [IHRB] 2017: 5). Principle 1 asserts that migrant workers should not incur recruiting expenses, while Principle 9 emphasises the need for access to remedies. Exorbitant recruiting expenses have led to debt bondage, coerced work, and human trafficking. Migrant workers may face opaque wage cuts if they are responsible for recruiting expenses (Institute for Human Rights and Business [IHRB] 17, 28).

METHODOLOGY

The study, focused on the Japanese case study, aims to comprehend national, bilateral, and global initiatives in fostering safe movement and fair recruitment. The case study was selected because to nations' initiation of bilateral initiatives by JICA aimed at zero-cost migration in the labour-sending countries. It analyses reports from international organisations, official documents, websites of the companies, online news media and secondary literature. The data are analysed and interpreted using a method known as qualitative content analysis. The analytical process includes the identification, location, selection, analysis, and synthesis of primary data from documents. Qualitative content analysis is executed through these steps: formulating research questions, selecting materials, developing a coding framework, segmenting the materials into coding units, testing the coding framework, evaluating and refining the coding framework, analysing the data, and presenting the research findings. Inductive analysis entails the methodical formation of categories and subcategories derived from empirical evidence (Schreier 2012).

PRACTICES TOWARDS ETHICAL RECRUITMENT AND FEE REDUCTION IN JAPAN

Lessons learned from Technical Intern Training Program

The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) of Japan began under an “international cooperation” framework in the late 1980s, transitioning from the 1990 Industrial Training Program to the official establishment of TITP in 1993, which imposed a two-year training restriction. In 2010, participants were classified as ‘workers’ rather than ‘trainees,’ thereby bringing them to the protections of Japanese labour law from the outset (OTIT 2024: 1). A



reform in 2017 established a new residency status—Technical Intern Training—and prolonged the programme to five years (OTIT 202: 6). By 2025, TITP has 91 job categories and 168 distinct tasks, demonstrating its extensive occupational range. The program functions under 18 bilateral Memoranda of Cooperation (MOC) between Japan and the sending nations, establishing a transnational administrative framework for the deployment and oversight of workers (JITCO 2025).

TITP workers are mostly engaged in manufacturing and agriculture, sectors where small and medium-sized firms significantly depend on their labour (OECD 2024: 82). Nevertheless, the system has encountered ongoing criticism. Inspections performed by the Organisation for Technical Intern Training (OTIT) and other agencies have uncovered a significant prevalence of labour law infringements among certified businesses (OECD 2024: 175). Issues include excessive overtime, hazardous work environments, and inappropriate pay deductions. Moreover, recruiting expenses and debt bondage are significant issues. Numerous trainees pay substantial fees and accrue debt to travel to Japan, sometimes to licensed or semi-official middlemen in their home countries (OECD 2024: 172; U.S. Department of State 2024). These debts produce a systemic vulnerability, preventing workers from reporting abuses or leaving from exploitative workplace.

International assessments, such as the Trafficking in Persons Report (U.S. Department of State 2024), have cautioned that such indebtedness and employer-based residency statuses render some individuals vulnerable to situations tantamount to labour exploitation. Academics and migrant rights organisations contend that the TITP operates primarily as a conduit for temporary low-skilled labour migration rather as a vehicle for skills transfer, perpetuating unequal power dynamics between employers and migrant workers (Burgess & Iles 2018; Onuki 2021). Notwithstanding the 2017 reforms—such as enhanced oversight by OTIT and more stringent regulation of supervising organisations—execution remains inconsistent. Current policy discussions focus on ethical recruiting, fee reimbursement, and possible transitions from the TITP to Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) status to promote equitable labour mobility and enhance protections for foreign workers in Japan (OECD 2024; OTIT 2024; U.S. Department of State 2024).

Government's Initiative in Japan: Ikusei Shūrō Program

The Ikusei Shūrō (Training and Employment) Program is Japan's new framework to replace the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). It will be introduced within 3 years from 2024¹ to strengthen worker protection, expand job mobility, and align with international labor standards. The initiative aims to mitigate labour shortages while promoting fairness and minimising the potential for exploitation, especially for international workers (Ministry of

¹ The law was enacted in 2024, and detailed manuals and ordinance draft were released for public comment in April 2025, pending the issuance of Ministerial Ordinances for implementation. The final outcome may be subject to new cabinet members to be selected Oct 2025.



Health, Labour and Welfare 2025). The following table delineates the distinctions between the former TITP and the newly established Ikusei Shūrō program. Under the Ikusei Shūrō program, the fees are limited to a maximum of two months' salary of the trainee paid to the sending organisations. The cost breakdown of fees to sending organisations should be transparent and uploaded through websites. In addition, the employers must pay when issuing a job posting to receiving recruitment organisation in Japan. Companies are prohibited from deducting the paid fees from workers. Moreover, the employment contract must be transparent in providing the cost breakdown. Together, these reforms aim to create a system that supports both Japan's labour needs and the protection of migrant workers, moving closer to ethical recruitment practices.

TABLE 1: Key Features of Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and *Ikusei Shūrō*

Category	Technical Intern Training Program (TITP)	Ikusei Shūrō (Training and Employment Program)
1. Recruitment fees	Unclear regulation, often high costs imposed by sending agencies, debt bondage is common	Fee cap set at max 2 months' salary to sending organisations; mandatory disclosure of costs breakdown online; kickbacks prohibited; Employer's pay when issuing a job posting to receiving recruitment/supervising organisation in Japan
2. Reimbursement/prohibition	Salary deductions, deposits and penalties used to recover costs; weak regulations	Explicit prohibition of deductions, deposits, and kickbacks; reimbursement and remedial measures required
3. Transparency	Cost breakdowns were unclear	Contract and cost breakdowns must be clearly disclosed in advance, in multiples languages, so workers understand their rights and obligations
4. Housing Conditions	Housing details reported but no obligation to submit proof of adequacy	Employers must submit documents proving housing is appropriate
5. Working condition	No specified regulations	Equal pay, equal learning opportunity, equal social benefits
6. Job Mobility (transfer)	Transfer are strictly limited, led to high risk of absconding	Transparent rules allow transfer under certain conditions, greater job mobility
7. Language training	Basic orientation provided but inconsistent in quality and duration	Clear learning targets (CEFR A1-A2 level); required hours of Japanese language training
8. Monitoring and Supervision	OTIT oversight often criticised as insufficient	Stricter registration and sanctions for supervising organisations; stronger monitoring
9. Career Path	Transition to Specified Skilled Worker unclear; many dropped out	Official pathway from Ikusei Shūrō to Specified Skilled Worker explicitly established



Sources: Compiled by the author with reference to *Ikusei Shūrō* parts from Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2025. <https://public-comment.e-gov.go.jp/pcm/download?seqNo=0000292196>

Companies' Initiatives: Responsible Business Alliance

Besides the aforementioned government initiatives, the actual fair recruitment practices were carried out by major Japanese corporations that are members of the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) or the Responsible Labour Initiative (RLI) under RBA. The RBA is the world's leading industry coalition committed to enhancing social, environmental, and ethical standards within global supply chains. Founded in 2004, it now encompasses members from the electronics, automotive, and various other industries. The RBA establishes a comprehensive Code of Conduct that encompasses labour rights, health and safety, environmental considerations, ethics, and management systems.² The RLI was established in 2017 to focus on the rights of migrant and marginalised workers. The principle at its core is the Employer Pays Principle, mandating that businesses, rather than workers, assume responsibility for recruitment-related fees and expenses.³ The RLI develops practical tools such as worker voice surveys, multilingual grievance mechanisms, and guidance for fee reimbursement when violations are found.⁴

TABLE 2: Remediation of Recruitment Fees Programme by Companies in Japan

Remediation of Recruitment Fees Programme	Companies
Companies whole policies explicitly stipulate "reimbursement of recruitment fees paid by workers"	Konica Minolta (Korea), Kyocera, Ricoh, Sharp Panasonic, Epson, Omron, Renesas
Companies with publicly disclosed cases of reimbursement	Epson; the Human Rights Due Diligence page reports concrete remedial actions, stating that recruitment fee borne by workers were "reimbursed" and intermediary fees were "halted and reimbursed" Panasonic Manufacturing Malaysia Berhad, "reimbursement of recruitment fees was implemented and provisions were made" for both existing and newly hired migrant workers (2024-2025)

² RBA Code of Conduct version 8.0 (2024), p.2, <https://www.responsiblebusiness.org/code-of-conduct/> (accessed Oct 16, 2025) clearly states that "Workers shall not be required to pay employers' agents or sub-agents' recruitment fees or other related fees for their employment. If any such fees are found to have been paid by workers, such fees shall be repaid to the worker."

³ RBA Practical Guide to Due Diligence on Recruitment Fees in International Supply Chains can be downloaded. <https://www.responsiblebusiness.org/publications/rba-practical-guide-no-fees> (accessed on Oct 16, 2025)

⁴ The RBA Worker Voice Platform includes worker surveys, on-site assessment support, mobile learning, and feedback and grievance reporting. <https://www.responsiblebusiness.org/tools/voices> (accessed on Oct 16, 2025)



Companies showing remedial measures and audits, but without explicit mention of reimbursement (based on public information)	Toyota Motor Corporation: Through JP-MIRAI utilisation, policies, and remedial processes are documented. Tokyo Electron. Supplier surveys cover “recruitment and employment fees borne by workers” with published remedial actions, discrepancy findings, and requests for remediation (as of Oct 2025).
---	---

Source: Authors’ Compilation from Websites of the Respective Company⁵

JICA’s Technical Cooperation Project “Supporting Access to Job Information for Vietnamese Overseas Workers” in Vietnam

The “Supporting Access to Job Information for Vietnamese Overseas Workers” is a JICA technical cooperation initiative that began in 2023. The program seeks to provide a comprehensive digital platform that offers Vietnamese job seekers in Japan direct access to verified employment information and encourages adherence to applicable rules and regulations among sending organisations. Thus, the project aims to ensure that overseas job applicants make informed choices about sending organisations and that overseas employment is conducted in compliance with the amended Work Agency Act and associated regulations (JICA 2023a).

The project implements a comprehensive system that allows job seekers to acquire verified employment data directly, in response to concerns regarding the swift rise of Vietnamese workers in Japan—projected at 476,000 in 2022—and ongoing issues such as exorbitant brokering fees, lack of transparency, and limited access to verified job information, (Immigration Services Agency 2022, 2024). The system seeks to prevent fraudulent activities and assure adherence to the amended Work Agency Act and other laws by removing reliance on unregulated intermediaries. The program underscores the significance of informed decision-making by applicants, allowing them to choose sending organisations that comply with legal and ethical criteria (Immigration Services Agency 2022).

⁵ The following sites were accessed on Sep 12, 2025 to compile the chart.

Konica Minolta CSR / RBA: <https://www.konicaminolta.com/global-en/newsroom/2024/1212-01-01.html>

Kyocera Sustainability: <https://global.kyocera.com/newsroom/news/2022/000587.html>

Ricoh Supplier Code: <https://www.ricoh.com/sustainability/supplychain>

Sharp CSR Report: <https://global.sharp/corporate/csr/report/backnumber/pdf/2019/19all.pdf>

Panasonic Human Rights: https://holdings.panasonic/global/corporate/sustainability/human_rights/

Epson Human Rights DD: <https://corporate.epson/en/sustainability/human-rights/index.html>

Omron Supply Chain: <https://www.omron.com/global/en/sustainability/supply-chain/>

Renesas Sustainability: <https://www.renesas.com/us/en/about/company/sustainability/supply-chain-management>

Toyota Human Rights: <https://global.toyota/en/sustainability/human-rights/>

Tokyo Electron CSR: <https://www.tel.com/sustainability/management-foundation/supply-chain-management/rba/>



The project aims to create a sustainable framework for international employment by collaborating with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB). Key initiatives include strengthening enforcement mechanisms, formulating policy measures informed by worker feedback, and devising action plans to improve career assistance for returnees. These initiatives seek to enhance fair recruiting practices, protect workers' rights, and foster the sustained stability of labour mobility between Vietnam and Japan (JICA 2023b). In 2025, the project launched the system, allowing job seekers to set conditions such as salary, occupation, and work location, and to search for suitable positions. Applicants can directly disclose their profiles and contact sending organisations. In Vietnam, Migrant Resource Centers—similar to Japan's Hello Work offices—are expected to play a key role in providing information and facilitating access to the system (Vietnam.Vn; Voice of Vietnam 2025).

The effectiveness of this initiative will largely depend on the degree to which sending organisations disclose job information and on the proactive engagement of job seekers. Ultimately, the project aims to create an environment where Vietnamese workers can utilise the system strategically and autonomously to pursue overseas employment opportunities.

Private Sector initiative for Promoting Transparent and Cost-Free Labour Migration: Vietnam-Japan Fair and Ethical Recruitment Initiative (VJ-FERI)

The VJ-FERI (Vietnam-Japan Fair and Ethical Recruitment Initiative) is a private-sector initiative aimed at promoting the recruitment of migrant workers in accordance with international standards by prohibiting the imposition of recruitment, placement, or associated fees on technical intern trainees and specified skilled workers coming to Japan from Vietnam. VJ-FERI prohibits workers from paying fees prior to their arrival in Japan by ensuring that all entities involved in the sending process—namely, employers (receiving companies), intermediaries (supervisory organisations, registered support organisations), and local sending organisations—perform their migration intermediation functions in compliance with the “FERI Guidelines” (JP-MIRAI 2025).

It was established by the “Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards a Responsible and Inclusive Society” (JP-MIRAI), a general incorporated association first developed with the cooperation of JICA. The programme implements a certification system for FERI job advertising based on the FERI principles created by JP-MIRAI in conjunction with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and legal specialists. It seeks to promote collaboration among all relevant parties to guarantee fair and ethical recruiting processes. Besides FERI accreditation, the project offers monitoring, third-party consultation, and complaint services for migrant workers facing difficulties. To get certification, firms are required to pay membership and inspection fees. The program operates in Vietnam, Indonesia, and Nepal (JP-MIRAI 2025).



A 2022 study by the Immigration Services Agency indicates that technical intern trainees in Japan incur average pre-arrival expenses of 540,000 yen, with some surpassing 1 million yen. High brokering fees, inappropriate contracts, and unclear fee structures have placed financial and psychological strains on workers. Transnational migration comprises the involvement of several organisations across both nations, leading individual companies to have difficulties in resolving these issues. In response, stakeholders in Japan and Vietnam initiated VJ-FERI to implement fair and ethical recruiting practices (JP-MIRAI 2025).

This initiative facilitates the transparent employment of migrant workers within the global human resources framework through the assessment and evaluation of migrant workers in both sending and receiving nations, adhering to legal and regulatory standards. Additionally, by disclosing details on certified member organisations and employment opportunities, the initiative seeks to establish a network of stakeholders dedicated to fair practices and to advance migrant labour standards based on global standards.

CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned initiatives cannot serve as a panacea for eliminating broker fees and debt-bonded labour unless the recruitment supply chain in sending countries is effectively monitored and regulated. This paper concludes with two complementary policy recommendations to promote fair recruitment practices. First, greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening a collaborative and co-creative “Migration Infrastructure” (Xiang & Lindquist 2014) that gradually replaces the broker’s traditional functions of *recruitment*, *selection*, *education*, and *placement*. A sustainable migration system requires institutional mechanisms linking sending and receiving countries to generate transparent and trustworthy infrastructures that reduce dependence on private intermediaries. For example, standardised curricula and certified training materials could be developed and disseminated through donor-supported initiatives to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions—including those in rural areas—at minimal or no cost by leveraging education-technology (ed-tech) platforms. Such support would professionalise pre-departure training and lower the financial burden on potential migrants.

Second, a digital job-matching ecosystem should be established to provide direct, accurate, and transparent information on vacancies, fees, and employment conditions. The application of digital-transformation (DX) tools can improve verification, minimise misinformation, and enhance accountability along the recruitment chain. Moreover, financial inclusion must form part of this agenda, ensuring that migrants can access secure payment channels, low-cost remittance systems, and ethical savings products that collectively reinforce a fair and sustainable migration route. Finally, extending these services to rural and remote communities is essential. Innovative delivery models are required to achieve such outreach. The example of India’s Common Service Centres (CSCs)—a nationwide digital network of



over 550,000–560,000 kiosks operated by young IT entrepreneurs—offers valuable inspiration. By adapting this model, sending countries could expand digital access points where potential migrants can receive verified information, register for training, and complete administrative procedures locally. Integrating such decentralised digital platforms with migration-management databases would embody a pragmatic shift *from exclusion to inclusion* of brokers as their functions, transforming them from profit-driven intermediaries into partners within a transparent, state-regulated migration infrastructure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by the Japan Foundation, Kuala Lumpur [JFKL Small Grant Programme] for a project titled “Global Migration and Japan’s Experience in Labour Migration”

REFERENCES

- Aaronson, S. A., & Higham, I. 2013. Re-Righting Business: John Ruggie and the Struggle to Develop International Human Rights Standards for Transnational Firms. *Human Rights Quarterly* 36(2): 333–364
- Burgess, C., & Iles, T. 2018. *Reforming the Technical Intern Training Program: Challenges in Protecting Migrant Workers in Japan*. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 27(3): 303–326
- Crépeau, F. 2018. Towards a Mobile and Diverse World: ‘Facilitating Mobility’ as a Central Objective of the Global Compact on Migration. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 30(4): 650–656.
- Farbenblum, B., & Nolan, J. 2017. The Business of Migrant Worker Recruitment: Who Has the Responsibility and Leverage to Protect Rights? *Texas International Law Journal* 52(1): 1–44.
- Hamada, Y. 2012. National Governance in International Labour Migration. *Migration and Development* 1(1): 50–71.
- Hugo, G. 2009. Best Practice in Temporary Labour Migration for Development: A Perspective from Asia and the Pacific. *International Migration* 47(5): 23–74.
- Ichimaru, H. (石丸大輝). 2024. From Exclusion to Inclusion of Migration Brokers: Rethinking Japan’s Development Cooperation with Vietnam through the Lens of ‘Migration Infrastructure’ — The 26th Spring Conference of the Japan Society for International Development (JASID) [移住ブローカーの排除から包摂へ—”移住インフラ”から考える日本の対ベトナム開発協力 国際開発学会第 26 回春季大会]



- Immigration Services Agency (出入国在留管理庁). 2022. 技能実習生の支払い費用に関する実態調査について [Survey on payment costs for technical intern trainees]. Available at <https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001377366.pdf>
- Immigration Services Agency (出入国在留管理庁). 2024. 令和 6 年 6 月末現在における在留外国人数について [Number of foreign residents as of the end of June 2024]. Available at https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00047.html
- International Labour Organization (ILO). 2009. *The cost of coercion: Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_106230.pdf
- ILO. 2014. *Fair Migration: Setting an ILO Agenda*. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_242879.pdf
- ILO. 2015. *Fair recruitment initiative: Fostering fair recruitment practices, preventing human trafficking and reducing the costs of labour migration*. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_320405.pdf
- ILO. 2019. *General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and Definition of recruitment fees and related costs*. Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_536755.pdf
- ILO and International Organization for Migration. 2020. "Promoting Fair and Ethical Recruitment in a Digital World: Lessons and Policy Options." Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_791270.pdf
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2014. *International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS)*. Available at <https://iris.iom.int/>
- IOM. 2019. *The IRIS Standard Version 1.2*. Available at <https://iris.iom.int/sites/iris/files/documents/IRIS%20Standard%20Report%20.pdf>
- Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB). 2017. *Migration with Dignity: Implementing the Dhaka Principles*. Available at <https://www.ihrb.org/dhaka-principles/implementation-guidance>
- Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards Responsible and Inclusive Society (JP-MIRAI) (責任ある外国人労働者受入プラットフォーム). 2024. FERI 拡大分科会資料 (2024 年 10 月 29 日) 目的：制度構築に向けた最終段階でのご意見聴取 [FERI Expansion Subcommittee Materials (October 29, 2024): Purpose - Final stage feedback for system development]. Available at https://jp-mirai.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Article_Report_20241111_5.pdf
- Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards Responsible and Inclusive Society (JP-MIRAI) (責任ある外国人労働者受入プラットフォーム). 2025. 公正で倫理的なリクルー



- ト FERI 移住労働者の高額な費用負担を是正するための枠組み [Fair and Ethical Recruitment Initiative (FERI): Framework to correct high cost burden on migrant workers]. Available at <https://jp-mirai.org/jp/feri/>
- Japan Platform for Migrant Workers towards Responsible and Inclusive Society (JP-MIRAI) (責任ある外国人労働者受入プラットフォーム). 2025. 活動報告 [Activity report]. Available at <https://jp-mirai.org/jp/activity-reports-ja/20250507/>
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). 2023a. ベトナム人海外就労希望者の求人情報へのアクセス支援プロジェクト [Project of Supporting to Connect Job Information for Vietnamese Workers to Work Abroad under Contract]. Available at <https://www.jica.go.jp/oda/project/202005122/>
- Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). 2023b. ベトナム人海外就労希望者の求人情報へのアクセス支援プロジェクト 事業事前評価表 [Preliminary evaluation sheet for the project to support Vietnamese workers seeking overseas employment]. Available at https://www2.jica.go.jp/ja/evaluation/pdf/2023_202005122_1_s.pdf
- Japan International Trainee & Skilled Worker Cooperation Organization. (JITCO). 2025. Bilateral Agreement for TITP. Available at <https://www.jitco.or.jp/ja/regulation/send/>
- Jones, K. 2022. A 'North Star' in Governing Global Labour Migration? The ILO and the Fair Recruitment Initiative. *Global Social Policy* 22(2): 303–322.
- Likić-Brborić, B. 2018. Global Migration Governance, Civil Society and the Paradoxes of Sustainability. *Globalizations*, 15(6): 762-778.
- Low, C. C. 2025. Contextualizing Fair Migration in Malaysia: From Sovereign Migration Governance Toward Developmental Global Migration Governance. *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 33: 261-278.
- Low, C. C. 2023. Migtech, Fintech and Fair Migration in Malaysia: Addressing The Protection Gap Between Migrant Rights and Labour Policies. *Third World Quarterly* 44(5): 872-891.
- Low, C. C. 2020. Migrant Labour Recruitment Reform in Malaysia: Towards Ethical and Zero-Cost Migration. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 10(2): 142-164.
- McAdam, J. 2019. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. *International Legal Materials* 58(1): 160-194
- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) 厚生労働. 2025. 出入国管理及び難民認定法及び外国人の技能実習の適正な実施及び技能実習生の保護に関する法律の一部を改正する法律の施行に伴う関係政令の整備及び経過措置に関する政令案概要 [Outline of the Cabinet Order on the Development of Related Government Ordinances and Transitional Measures Accompanying the Enforcement of the Act for Partial Revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and the Act on Proper Technical Intern Training and Protection of Technical Intern Trainees]. Available at <https://public-comment.e-gov.go.jp/pcm/download?seqNo=0000292196>



- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2001. *The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Policy Brief June 2001*. <https://www.oecd.org/investment/mne/1903291.pdf>
- OECD. 2011. *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises*. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264115415-en>
- OECD. 2024. *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Japan 2024*. Available at https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/recruiting-immigrant-workers-japan-2024_0034390d/0e5a10e3-en.pdf
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 2011a. *The UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights: An Introduction*. Available at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/Intro_Guiding_PrinciplesBusinessHR.pdf
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR. 2011b. *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework*. Available at https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf
- Onuki, H. 2021. *Japan's Side-Door Immigration Policy and the Expansion of Low-Skilled Labor Migration*. In *Migration and the Future of Work in East Asia*, edited by R. H. Adams, 45–62). Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.
- Organization for Technical Intern Training (OTIT). 2024. Technical Intern Training Program Available at https://www.otit.go.jp/upload/docs/241224_ENG.pdf
- Piper, N., Rosewarne, S., & Withers, M. 2016. *Redefining a Rights-Based Approach in the Context of Temporary Labour Migration in Asia* (No. 2016-11). UNRISD Working Paper.
- Pittman, P. 2016. Alternative Approaches to the Governance of Transnational Labor Recruitment. *International Migration Review* 50(2): 269-314.
- Pécoud, A. 2021. Narrating an Ideal Migration World? An Analysis of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. *Third World Quarterly* 42(1): 16-33.
- Rotaèche, C. G. 2019. The Constant Link Between Migration and Sustainable Development: The 2030 Agenda and the 'Leave No One Behind' Principle. In *The Relevance of Migration for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, edited by C. U. de Sousa, 27-48. Lisbon: Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa.
- Ruggie, J. 2008. Protect, Respect and Remedy: A Framework for Business and Human Rights. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 3(2): 189-212.
- Ruggie, J., & Nelson, T. 2015. *Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises: Normative Innovations and Implementation Challenges*. Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Working Paper No. 66. Available at https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/john-ruggie/files/ruggie_tamarynnelson.pdf
- Schreier, M. 2012. *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications, Inc.



- Solomon, M. K., & Sheldon, S. 2018. The Global Compact for Migration: From the Sustainable Development Goals to a Comprehensive Agreement on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 30(4): 584–590.
- United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2015. *The Role of Recruitment Fees and Abusive and Fraudulent Practices of Recruitment Agencies in Trafficking in Persons*. Vienna: United Nations.
- U. S. Department of State. 2024. *Trafficking in Persons Report: Japan*. Available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/japan/>
- Vietnam.vn. 2025. Giải pháp số hỗ trợ người lao động Việt Nam đi làm việc ở nước ngoài [Digital solutions to support Vietnamese workers working abroad]. Available at <https://www.vietnam.vn/tang-cuong-quan-ly-lao-dong-di-lam-viec-tai-nuoc-ngoai/>
- Voice of Vietnam (VOV). 2025. DOLAB, JICA job application platform launched for overseas employment. Available at <https://english.vov.vn/en/society/dolab-jica-job-application-platform-launched-for-overseas-employment-post1218914.vov>
- Verité. 2021. *A Brief Guide to Ethical Recruitment for the Palm Oil Sector*. Available at <https://www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/A-Brief-Guide-to-Ethical-Recruitment-for-the-Palm-Oil-Sector.pdf>
- Wickramasekara, P., & Baruah, N. 2017. Fair Recruitment for Low-Skilled Migrant Workers: Issues and Challenges. In *Safeguarding the Rights of Asian Migrant Workers from home to the Workplace*, 23-38. Manila: Asian Development Bank Institute.
- Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. 2014. Migration Infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, 48(1_suppl): 122-148.



Saeko NODA
Graduate School of International Social Development,
Nihon Fukushi University,
Chita District, Aichi 470-3233, JAPAN/
Hitonomori Co., Ltd.
Ichinomiya, Aichi 491-0854, JAPAN
E-Mail: info@hitonomori.com

Hinako EBA
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA),
Malaysia Office, 50450 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
E-Mail: hinakoeba@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Choo Chin LOW (Corresponding author)
School of Distance Education,
Universiti Sains Malaysia,
11800 Penang, MALAYSIA
E-Mail: lowc@usm.my