

## Supporting foreign residents, international students and researchers in Japan

February 2, 2021

**Throughout the current COVID-19 pandemic it has become very clear how important research is to the future of humanity.** Countries that provide strong and supportive environments for research and innovation will recover more quickly from the economic and human toll of the crisis. We encourage the government to make policy decisions that will strengthen Japan's leadership role in open and collaborative global research by providing fair and equal treatment to the community of foreign researchers in Japan. This is needed so that those who have settled here can have confidence that their commitment to Japan will be repaid by a matching commitment from Japan, helping us all to build a truly global research community.

**In Japan, there are about 39,300 foreign researchers in universities and research institutions and about 277,000 foreign workers with expert or technical status, according to the most recently available [data](#) by JASSO, the Japan Student Services Organization.** In 2019, [there were](#) about 312,000 foreign exchange students, of which over 50,000 enrolled in graduate courses. Foreign researchers make important contributions to Japan's technical capacity and contribute to the objective of internationalising research and the higher education sector. Foreign researchers and students have shown a supportive long-term relationship with Japan and they make significant personal commitments of time and effort to help build collaborations and to enrich the research environment in Japan. Foreign researchers and research students also contribute to the vibrancy of entrepreneurship and the innovation culture of Japan by establishing start-up businesses that grow out of research collaborations. Many high-tech businesses in Japan depend on foreign researchers to support their innovative capacity.

**Japan is indeed a great place to do research, from a unique connection between industrial R&D and academic research, to a cutting-edge research focus on impactful research areas.** Japanese institutions controlled by MEXT, such as the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), provide examples of excellence for the global research community, with tailored efforts at attracting research talent and letting it thrive. Japan's long-standing reputation as a secure and reliable country for research and innovation collaboration depends also on opportunities for future contributions and collaborations. Foreign researchers and students are working to support Japan's continuing commitment to international research and education collaboration and to providing a barrier-free and supportive environment for international students and researchers. Last but not least foreign researchers support the Japanese Government's many efforts to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and the upcoming vaccination response. Many foreign researchers have made Japan their home (mid-length and long-stay researchers have been around 13,000 every year from 2000 to 2010). Our spouses may be Japanese, our children go to school here, we pay taxes here, we have friends and family here. We do our share to contribute to Japanese society.

**Nevertheless, the past months have been hard to bear for foreigners in general and foreign researchers in particular in Japan.** As of July 2020, over 208,000 foreign residents were [reported](#) as currently abroad, and at least half of them were willing to re-enter the country. We are aware of cases of researchers and research students who have suffered personal and financial hardship as a result of the long period when they could not return to their homes. The excellent Japanese research environment has been [affected](#) by the entry-ban policy, which led some international researchers and students to rethink their current relation to Japan and the possibility to come and remain. This point was well expressed by the Japan Association of National Universities (JANU) in their letter to the Minister of Education in May 2020 about the importance of "easing restrictions" for international researchers who come to Japan for advancements in science and technology. More recently, the necessity for the government to engage with foreign residents has been also highlighted in a [joint statement](#) by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce together with the European Business Council and the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan. Previously, also the Australian and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ANZCCJ) [expressed](#) its concerns regarding the Japanese Government's immigration policy amid the COVID crisis, requesting that foreign residents of Japan be subject to the same public health protocols of Japanese nationals.

**We are aware that the Japanese Government is progressively easing the conditions for re-entry of foreigner residents in Japan, as the decision of lifting the entry ban on foreign residents from September 1st, 2020 demonstrates.** However, the limitations endured by foreign residents at the beginning of the pandemic manifest an alarming point for a reconsideration of current policies in Japan in view of an unlikely but possible future crisis of the same scale as the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Actions in the direction to guarantee to the long and short-term foreign residents in Japan an equitable treatment even in the outbreak of a global crisis, represent fundamental steps for prosperous continuation of research in Japan, hence for its own future. As [pointed out](#) by RIKEN's director for international affairs, the crisis will greatly disrupt science collaboration in the short term, but make international cooperation even more important in the long term.

**We look forward to a 2021 where collaboration and mobility in research are again actively fostered in Japan.**

– The Board of the **Association of Italian Researchers in Japan (AIRJ)** [airj.info](http://airj.info)



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