

## Section 2

# Supporting Japanese Nationals Overseas

### 1 Risks and Safety of Japanese Nationals Overseas

#### (1) Incidents and Accidents in 2021 and Countermeasures

As of 2021, approximately 510,000 Japanese nationals<sup>1</sup> travelled overseas over the course of the year, and approximately 1.34 million Japanese nationals live abroad (as of October 2021). Hence, protecting the lives and health of Japanese nationals traveling and residing abroad, as well as promoting their interests, is one of the most important missions of MOFA.

No Japanese nationals have been victims of terrorism incidents since 2020. However, 2021 was another year in which a large number of terrorist attacks occurred in various regions. The main terrorism incidents included serial suicide attacks in Baghdad, Iraq<sup>2</sup> (January), attacks at massage parlors in Atlanta, the U.S. (March), an attack in Palma, Mozambique (March), a suicide attack in Makassar, Indonesia (March), an attack at a police station in a Paris suburb, France (April), a knife attack in Wurzburg, Germany (June), a suicide attack near the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan (August), an attack with a bow and arrow and other weapons in Kongsberg, Norway (October), a fatal knife attack against a House of Commons member

in Leigh-On-Sea, the UK (October), a taxi explosion in Liverpool, the UK (November), and serial suicide attacks in Kampala, Uganda (November).

In recent years, terrorist attacks have been occurring not only in the Middle East and Africa but also in Europe, the U.S. and Asia where many Japanese nationals travel and reside. There continues to be a large number of homegrown terrorist attacks perpetrated by those born in Western countries and indoctrinated through websites or other means by foreign Islamic extremists, lone-wolf terrorist attacks perpetrated by those acting on their own with little organizational background, and terrorist attacks that are aimed at “soft targets” - locations where unspecified numbers of the general public gather every day. Especially in the U.S., alarms are being sounded over hate crimes motivated by hatred toward a particular race or ethnic group, as well as domestic terrorism perpetrated by extremists and others with anti-government ideology.

In 2021, the number of people traveling overseas did not increase significantly due to the ongoing impact of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). While the number of incidents in which Japanese nationals fell victim to crimes declined compared to normal years, such incidents occurred worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ministry of Justice, “Statistics on Legal Migrants”

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the incidents listed, several large-scale terrorist attacks occurred in 2021 in countries and regions for which Travel Advice and Warning levels 4 and 3 have been issued, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Somalia.

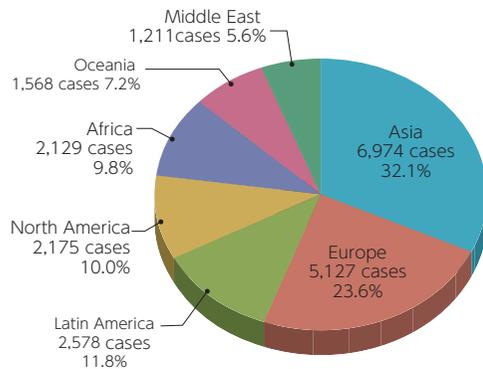
### Top 20 foreign diplomatic missions with a large number of support cases

Rank	Diplomatic mission	Number of cases
1	Embassy of Japan in the Philippines	1,355
2	Embassy of Japan in Thailand	1,268
3	Embassy of Japan in Korea	503
4	Consulate-General of Japan in Denpasar	449
5	Consulate-General of Japan in Vancouver	430
6	Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Kazakhstan	397
7	Embassy of Japan in the UK	387
8	Consulate-General of Japan in New York	352
9	Consulate-General of Japan in Shanghai	348
10	Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria	339

Rank	Diplomatic mission	Number of cases
11	Consulate-General of Japan, Melbourne Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia	338
12	Embassy of Japan in Italy	305
13	Embassy of Japan in Germany	294
14	Embassy of Japan in France	283
15	Embassy of Japan in the State of Qatar	283
16	Embassy of Japan in Djibouti	279
17	Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney	271
18	Embassy of Japan in Croatia	269
19	Embassy of Japan in Norway	267
20	Embassy of Japan in Ecuador	266

(Figures are shown for the 20 diplomatic missions with the largest number of support cases, including embassies, consulate-generals, and consular offices.)

### Breakdown of statistics for support to overseas Japanese nationals in 2020, by region



Natural disasters also occurred around the world and caused great damage. These included floods due to heavy rainfall mainly in western Germany and southern Belgium in July and a volcanic eruption in the Canary Islands in Spain in September.

In 2021, in response to the worsening security situation in various parts of the world due to political instability and other factors, MOFA warned Japanese residents through Travel Advice and Warning, Spot Safety Information, and consular e-mails. Amidst the deteriorating situation in Israel and Palestine, MOFA raised the risk level for the Gaza Strip and its border areas to evacuate and avoid all travel in May, but following the subsequent cease-fire, lowered it to the original level of avoid all travel in July. For Sudan, due to the detention of senior government officials by the

military and protests against the detention, MOFA issued Spot Safety Information and sent consular e-mails in September to advise against non-essential outings. For Ethiopia, where intense fighting broke out between government and rebel forces, MOFA raised the risk level to evacuate and avoid all travel for the entire country in November and strongly urged Japanese residents to evacuate from the country. Amidst heightened tensions with Russia since December, MOFA also raised the risk level for all of Ukraine to evacuate and avoid all travel, and has urged Japanese residents to return to Japan on commercial flights.

As was the case in 2020, there were continued reports of people falling ill during a trip abroad and dying at the hotels or other accommodations they were staying at. In some of these accidents and illnesses, victims faced difficulties in dealing with higher medical and transportation costs and receiving insufficient medical services compared to those in Japan, as well as differences in quarantine systems among countries.

Whenever necessary, MOFA issues overseas travel safety information on infectious diseases, air pollution and other risks in countries and regions where health and medical caution is required, in order to communicate the current outbreak situation and prevention measures, and highlight matters worth paying attention to when travelling and staying in the affected regions.

Since the end of 2019, new cases of COVID-19

infections decreased in some regions as the vaccination rollout progressed. Nevertheless, COVID-19 continued to spread across the world in 2021, following on from 2020, due to the emergence of mutant strains such as the highly infectious Delta and Omicron variants. In response, MOFA has been disseminating information such as Travel Advice and Warning on Infectious Diseases and Spot Safety Information to Japanese nationals residing or traveling abroad in order to raise their awareness in a timely and appropriate manner, via its website and e-mails (see the Opening Special Feature 2 on page 2).

As for other infectious diseases, cases of Ebola were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Guinea, and measles was prevalent in various parts of the world. In addition, cases of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) have been reported in the Middle East. Mosquito-borne diseases, including the Zika virus, yellow

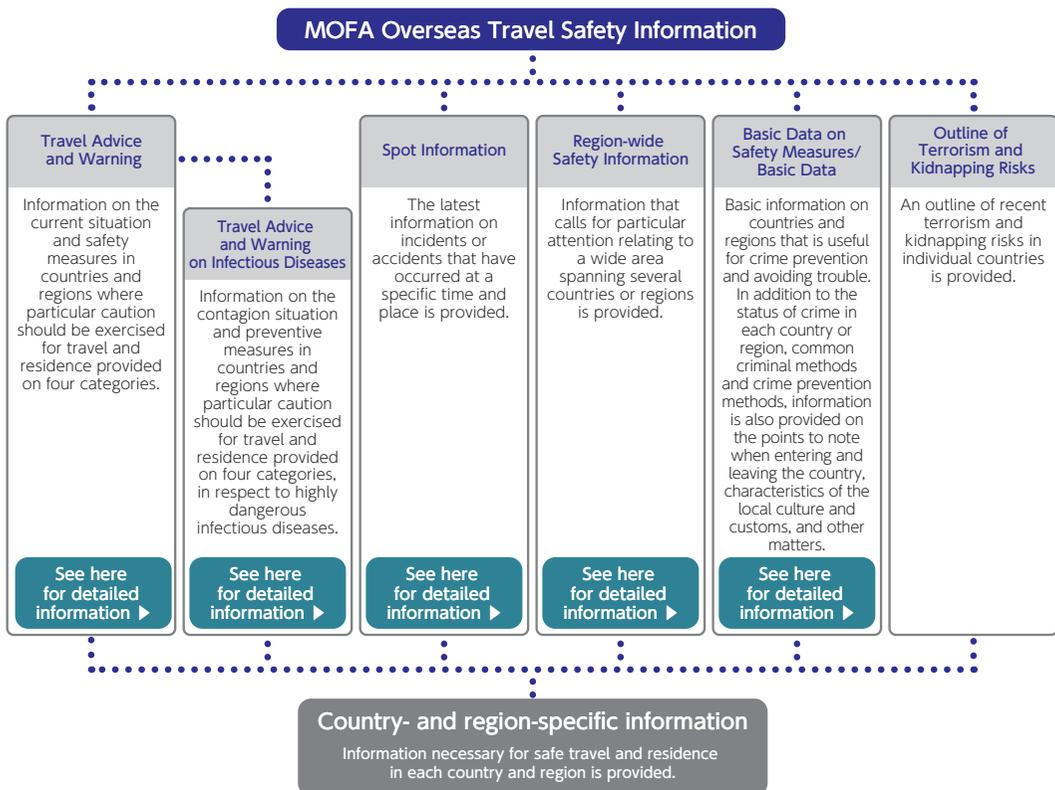
fever, dengue fever and malaria, also spread throughout the world.

## (2) Safety Measures for Japanese Nationals Overseas

The number of Japanese nationals receiving support or protection from Japanese diplomatic missions overseas and the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association fell in 2020 to a total of 14,771, given that the number of people traveling overseas did not significantly increase due to the impact of COVID-19. Nevertheless, the number of cases of support or protection increased to 21,762 as Japanese embassies, consulates-general and other diplomatic missions worldwide frequently assisted Japanese residents and travelers who had difficulty returning to Japan, and communicated COVID-19 information.

The safety of Japanese nationals is threatened constantly in various regions throughout the

Main Overseas Safety Information posted on MOFA's Overseas Safety Website (structure and overview)



world. In particular, with the prolonged impact of COVID-19, Japanese nationals traveling abroad must be prepared for multiple risks such as terrorist attacks amid an infectious disease pandemic, continued restrictions on entry and movement imposed on the travelers of various countries and various constraints such as reduced flights. In addition, because it is becoming more difficult than ever before to respond in cases where such travelers are unfortunate enough to encounter a terrorist attack or other incident or accident while overseas, the need for every possible effort to be expended on overseas safety measures is increasing all the more.

Based on this perspective, MOFA works to enhance the safety awareness of Japanese nationals and promote its safety measures by disseminating information widely to the general public.

Specifically, MOFA added panels to its Overseas Safety website page for easy access to the necessary information, and issues the latest safety information for each country and region on the website. In addition, MOFA emails the latest safety information on travel destinations to Japanese residents and travelers who have registered with Overseas Residential Registrations, or Tabi-Regi, MOFA's overseas travel registration service.

MOFA strives to enhance the knowledge and capability of the Japanese people concerning overseas safety measures and crisis management through seminars and training. In 2021 MOFA held virtual seminars on safety measures inside and outside Japan to address the need for safety measures taking into account the prolonged impact of COVID-19. Furthermore, Consular Affairs Bureau staff delivered lectures in a virtual format at seminars held throughout Japan by domestic organizations, associations and other groups (12 times overseas and 11 times within Japan).

In addition, the public and private sectors are cooperating to advance safety measures even overseas, and the diplomatic missions in each country host regular meetings of Security Consultation and Liaison Committees. Even

amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the diplomatic missions overseas are continuing to share information, exchange opinions and bolster collaboration in preparation for emergencies with local Japanese nationals in their respective countries, including by hosting such events online.

Following the terrorist attack in Dhaka in July 2016, MOFA developed Golgo 13's Security Guidelines for Japanese SMEs Abroad, with the aim of raising the awareness of international cooperation personnel, as well as small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), students studying abroad and short-term travelers, who have limited access to information on safety. MOFA continued to promote awareness by adding cases and commentary on addressing the combined risk of an infectious disease pandemic and terrorist attacks and other composite risks to the Security Guidelines.

Furthermore, with regard to Japanese students studying overseas, MOFA personnel hold lectures at universities and other educational institutions, on the grounds that many such institutions have not accumulated sufficient expertise or experience in safety measures and dealing with emergency situations, and requested their cooperation in raising the submission rate of Overseas Residential Registrations. Requests for lectures



from educational institutions declined in 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19, but MOFA nevertheless continues to strive to help those institutions to raise awareness of safety measures among their students and build in-house crisis management structures, including by holding online lectures on safety measures. MOFA is moving ahead with efforts to connect government agencies with educational institutions, overseas study agencies and students studying abroad, by beginning an automatic Tabi-Regi registration system with some overseas study institutions.

As for safety measures for short-term travelers, MOFA is engaged in PR activities mainly focused on promoting registration to the above-mentioned Tabi-Regi, including by distributing information cards and the *Kaigai Anzen Tora no Maki* (handbook for overseas travelers).

As of November 2021, the number of travelers who had registered on Tabi-Regi since its launch in July 2014 exceeded 6.75 million, reflecting initiatives for enhancing the system's convenience and activities that aim at promoting registration.

## 2 Consular Service and Assistance for Japanese Living Overseas

### (1) Improving Consular Service

With the aim of providing quality consular services to Japanese nationals overseas, MOFA conducts a questionnaire survey every year on services such as consular staff's attitudes in over-the-counter and telephone responses as well as work implementation status at diplomatic missions overseas. The survey conducted in January 2021 covered 145 diplomatic missions overseas and received valid responses from 18,349 people. The survey results suggested that respondents were for the most part satisfied with the level of consular services provided by diplomatic missions overseas. Nevertheless, some respondents also submitted views calling for improvements in consular staff's attitude to users, including that staff seem to adopt matter-of-fact attitudes and terms

of speech. MOFA takes such user feedback seriously, and will continue its efforts to enhance services and make improvements so as to provide better consular services that are oriented to the perspective of its users.

In addition, MOFA will further digitalize consular procedures, including online application of passports, visas and certificates, as well as introduce cashless payment approach for fees in order to increase user convenience.

### (2) Passports: Maintaining trustworthiness, enhancing convenience and making administrative tasks more efficient

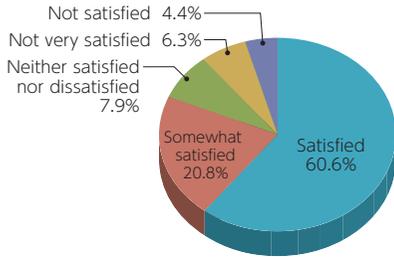
The issuance of Japanese passports has continued to slow down since 2020, due to the global decline in overseas travel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of passports issued in 2021 was 630,000, falling by 53.1% compared to 2020. In addition, there were approximately 24.4 million valid passports in circulation as of the end of December, falling by 11.9% compared to 2020.

In July 2021, municipalities began issuing paper COVID-19 vaccination certificates for overseas travel that conform with Japan's own specifications. Since December, Japan has also issued certificates with a 2D barcode (electronic version) for overseas use. The barcode adopts the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Visible Digital Seal for Non-Constrained Environments (VDS-NC) standard, which uses a system that authenticates genuine passports.

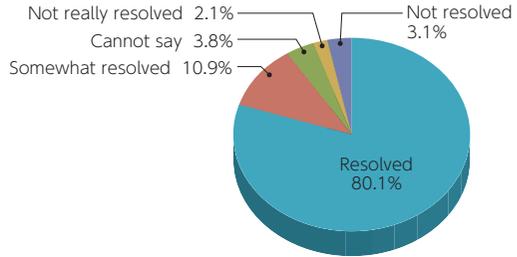
On the basis of the "Digital Government Execution Plan" that was amended in December 2020, MOFA has been working closely with relevant ministries and agencies, including the Digital Agency, to prepare for the launch of online passport applications by the end of March 2023, taking into account the opinions of diverse stakeholders received at regular consultations with prefectures and from expert study groups. Specifically, a website for online applications will be created on the My Number Portal (a government-run online administrative service). Applicants in Japan will

Results of questionnaire survey on users of consular services (FY2021: 141 diplomatic missions)

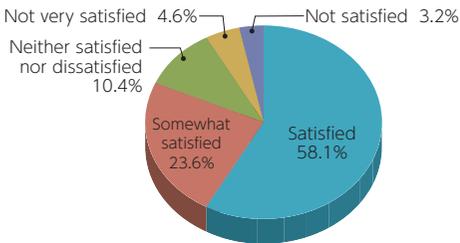
Overall, how satisfied are you with the consular services you have received?



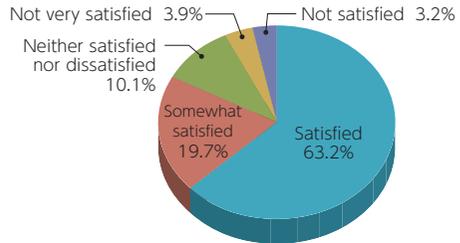
Has your problem (application, notification, consultations, etc.) been resolved through the use of consular services?



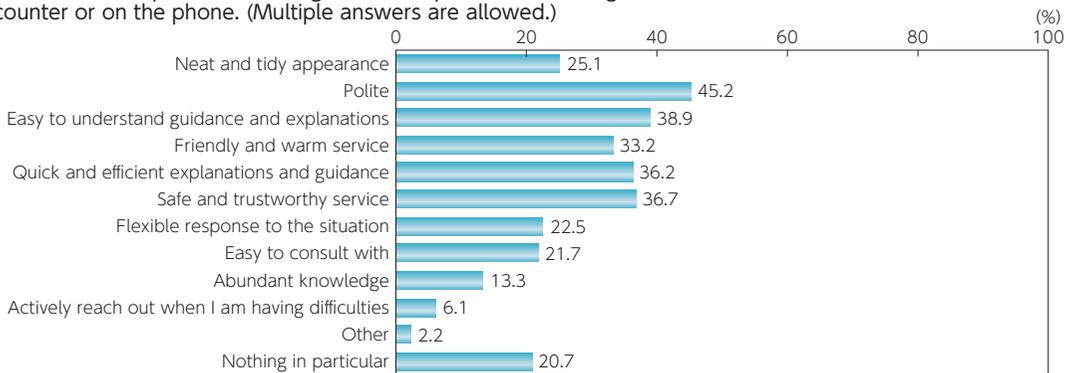
How satisfied are you with the knowledge of duties and processing speed of the consular services?



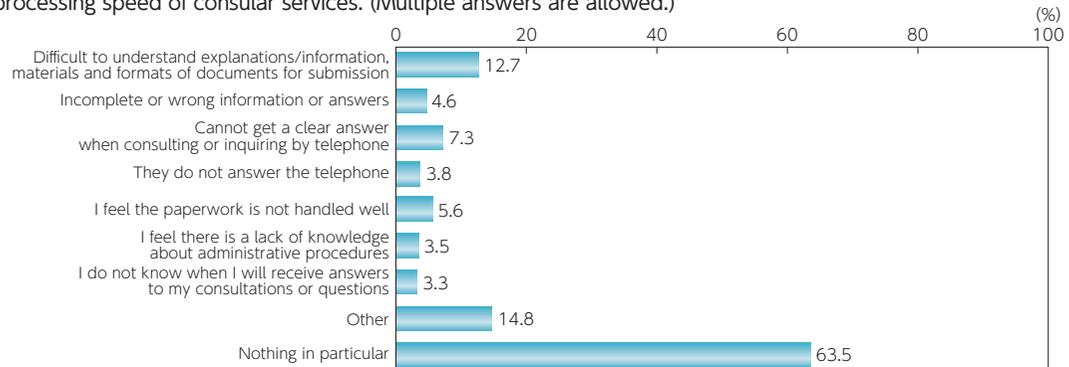
How satisfied were you with the customer service manners of staff while receiving consular services?



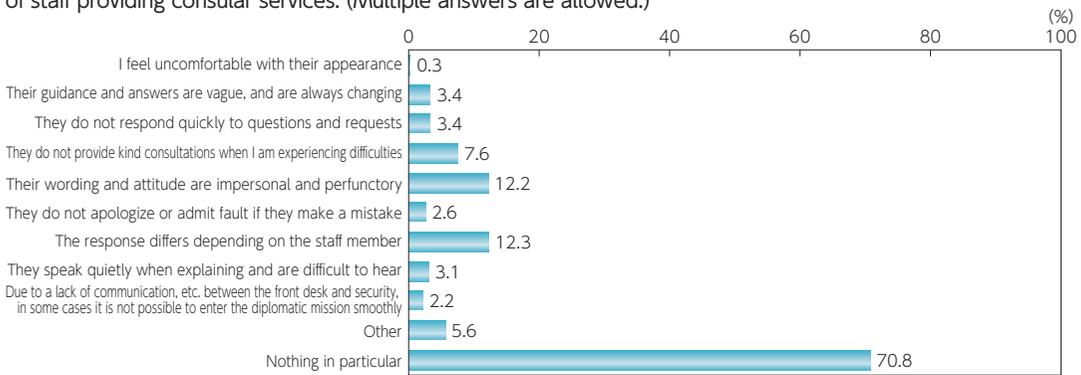
Please select any of the following items that you found to be "good" about the staff at the consular service counter or on the phone. (Multiple answers are allowed.)



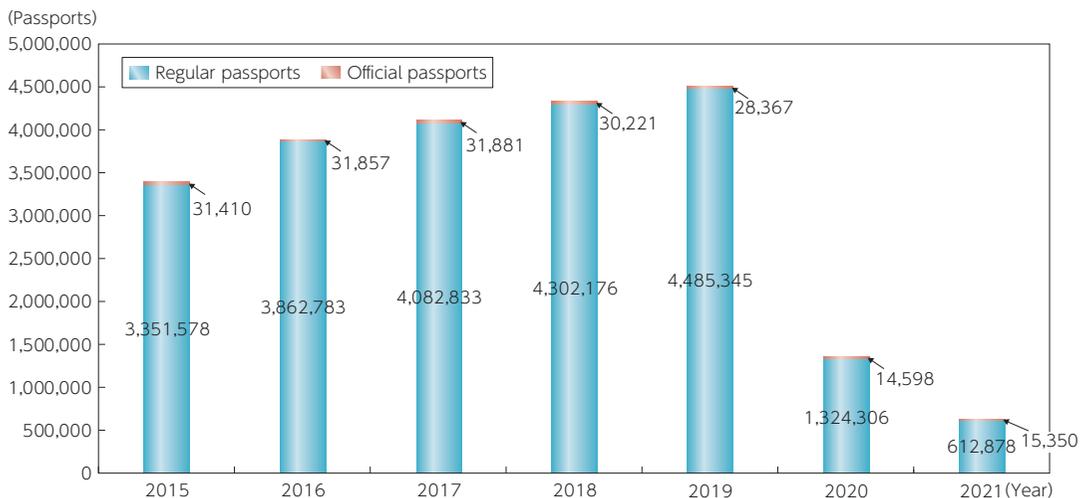
Please select all that apply if you feel that improvement needs to be made for the knowledge of duties and processing speed of consular services. (Multiple answers are allowed.)



Please select all that apply if you feel that improvement needs to be made for the customer service manners of staff providing consular services. (Multiple answers are allowed.)



### Changes in the number of passports issued



Note: Official passports include diplomatic passports.

Source: Prepared based on passport statistics for 2021 (MOFA's Passport Division)

be able to take a photograph of their face and create a signature and submit them via a smartphone or other devices. In principle, this will make it unnecessary to appear at the counter in person when applying to switch to (renew) passports that do not require submission of a transcript or extract of the family register. At the same time, MOFA will use digital technology to make passport operations more efficient and engage in legislation development for this purpose.

As applicants will be able to refer to electronic certificates of the family register from FY2024, MOFA will make efforts to eliminate the need to appear at the counter in person in principle for

new applications as well. In addition, in order to better prevent passport forgery and alteration, MOFA will introduce next-generation passports with laser printing on thermoplastic material. MOFA has also begun considering the possibility of issuing passports that can be delivered upon request, in preparation for the development and design of a system for safe and secure issuance of passports through means such as identity verification using the Individual Number Card (My Number Card).

In a passport index (number of travel destination countries not requiring visas) that was announced by a private-sector UK company in

January 2022, Japanese passports ranked first out of 111 countries, the same as Singapore. MOFA will continue to engage in maintaining the trustworthiness of Japanese passports while enhancing convenience for applicants and making passport administrative operation more efficient.

### (3) Overseas Voting

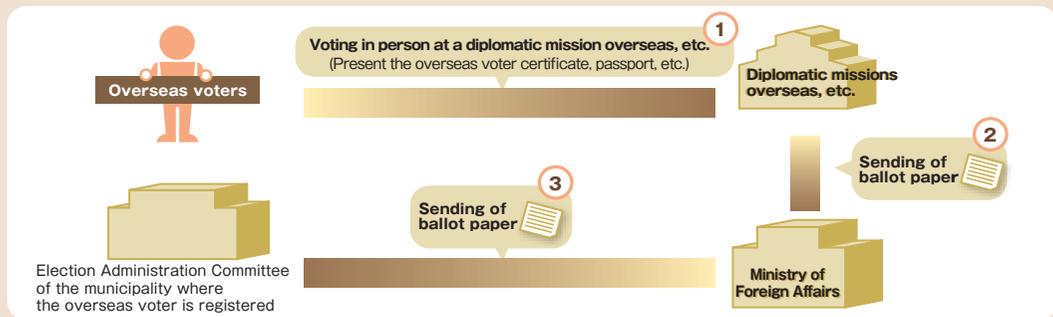
The overseas voting system allows Japanese voters living overseas to vote in national elections. In order to vote through the overseas voting system, it is necessary to be registered in advance

on the overseas voter directory managed by the election board of the city or town government and to obtain overseas voter identification. Starting in June 2018, in addition to the conventional method of applying through a diplomatic mission overseas after moving there, Japanese nationals can now apply at their municipal service counter at the same time as filing their notice of moving overseas. As a result, there is no longer a need to appear in person at a diplomatic mission overseas after moving outside Japan, which simplifies procedures. Voters can vote by choosing one of the three methods of

#### Voting in elections for overseas voters

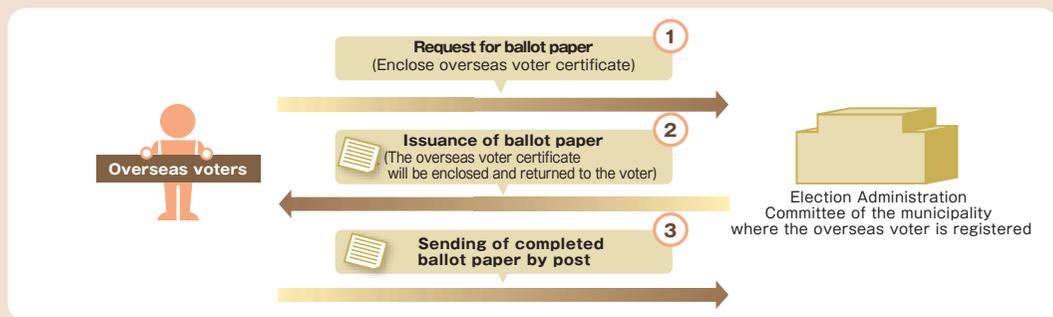
##### a. Voting at a foreign diplomatic mission

Voters who are registered on the overseas electoral roll may vote by presenting their overseas voter certificates, passports and other necessary documents to a diplomatic mission overseas set up as a polling station. (The period and time of voting differs depending on the diplomatic mission.)



##### b. Postal voting

Send the overseas voter certificate and request form for ballot paper to the chairperson of the Election Administration Committee of the municipality that you are registered with to request for a ballot paper. Complete and return the ballot paper to the chairperson of the Election Administration Committee of the municipality, ensuring that the ballot paper reaches the polling station by the time the voting ends on the date of the election in Japan (8:00 p.m. Japan time). (Voting is carried out from the day after the date of public notice.)



##### c. Voting in Japan

In the case where the overseas voter returns temporarily to Japan at the time of the elections, or where the overseas voter is not yet registered on the electoral roll in Japan after returning to Japan, he or she may vote through the same voting methods as voters in Japan (early voting, absentee voting, voting on election day)

voting, a) voting at diplomatic missions overseas, b) voting by mail, or c) voting in Japan.

The diplomatic missions overseas have been making efforts to spread the overseas voting system and to increase the number of registered voters by publicizing the overseas voting system to the territories under their jurisdiction and carrying out a visiting service for the registration of Japanese nationals living in remote areas. In addition, whenever an election is held, diplomatic missions overseas are responsible for voting administration, including PR prior to elections. In 2021, for the 49th general election of the House of Representatives, voting at diplomatic missions overseas was conducted for the 15th time involving 226 diplomatic missions and offices. Ahead of the regular election of the House of Councillors to be held in 2022, MOFA will continue its PR and other activities to increase the number of registered voters and promote voting at diplomatic missions overseas.

#### **(4) Assistance for Japanese Nationals Living and Engaging in Activities Overseas**

##### **A Japanese Schools and Supplementary Education Schools**

Education for children is one of the major concerns for Japanese nationals living abroad. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, MOFA provides assistance to Japanese Schools (partial assistance for school building rental fees, remuneration for locally hired teachers, and safety measures expenses) so that the overseas school children at the age of compulsory education in Japan can receive a level of education equivalent to that in Japan. MOFA also provides the same assistance for Japanese Schools to Supplementary Education Schools (educational institutions established to maintain children's academic ability, such as Japanese language proficiency) mainly in areas where Japanese Schools are not located.

In 2021, additional assistance was provided to Japanese Schools and Supplementary Education

Schools whose school operations were affected by the decrease in students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. MOFA also provided assistance until March 2022 to Japan societies and Japanese Schools that offer e-libraries and online learning services, so that children aged 3 to 18 living abroad can study while taking measures against infectious diseases.

##### **B Medical/Health Measures**

MOFA gathers information on outbreaks of infectious diseases overseas and provides this information to a broad audience through the overseas safety website, websites of diplomatic missions overseas, emails and other means. Furthermore, in order to provide health advice through consultations to Japanese nationals residing in countries where the medical situation is poor, MOFA dispatches medical teams with the cooperation of domestic medical institutions (not implemented in FY2021 due to the impact of COVID-19). MOFA also organizes health and safety virtual lectures by medical specialists for regions where infectious diseases or air pollution are becoming serious issues.

##### **C Support for Japanese Nationals Living**

###### **Overseas and Japanese Descendants (Nikkei)**

Between March and December 2021, in order to support Japanese nationals living overseas and Japanese descendants (Nikkei) whose lifestyles are being disrupted by the spread of COVID-19, MOFA carried out the Program to Strengthen Livelihood and Business Foundations for Japanese Nationals Overseas and People of Japanese Descent (Nikkei), which supported projects that are being implemented by Japan societies, Japanese chambers of commerce and industry and Nikkei groups overseas. The projects included PCR testing, distribution of masks and disinfectants, and other awareness raising in order to halt the spread of infections, as well as legal and tax consultation services to nurture business environments. Until March 2022, MOFA also carried out a

program that provided medical and psychological counseling to Japanese nationals living overseas.

#### **D Responses to Other Needs**

In order to eliminate the complexity of various procedures for Japanese nationals living overseas (such as converting Japanese driver's licenses, obtaining residence/work permits) and to make living abroad more comfortable, MOFA continues to engage with the authorities in the respective countries where Japanese nationals reside.

For example, when converting driver's licenses issued in foreign countries to Japanese driver's licenses, all persons with driver's licenses issued in a foreign country are exempted from taking certain sections of the Japanese driver's license examination (theory/practical), when it has been confirmed that they have no problems with driving vehicles. On the other hand, as it is mandatory for Japanese nationals to take driving tests when converting Japanese driver's licenses to local licenses in some countries and states, MOFA is calling for those countries to simplify the procedures for license conversion to the same degree as in Japan.

MOFA also supports victims of atomic bombings living overseas in applying for the authorization of Atomic Bomb Diseases and for the issuance of Health Check Certificates, via diplomatic and consular missions. Furthermore, for Japanese nationals struggling with loneliness and social isolation, MOFA offers referrals to groups with consultation services (see the Column on page 367).

### **3 Cooperation with Emigrants and Japanese Descendants (Nikkei)**

The migration of Japanese nationals overseas has a history of 153 years, as of 2021. There are over 3.8 million overseas Japanese and Japanese descendants (Nikkei) around the world, with especially large numbers residing in North, Central

and South America. They make a significant contribution to the development of the countries in various fields, including politics, the economy, education and culture, and at the same time, they act as a bridge between Japan and these countries in developing close relations.

Together with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), MOFA provides cooperation in Central and South America, where over two million Nikkei live. Various forms of assistance are offered, including welfare support for aging emigrants, training in Japan for Nikkei people, and dispatch of volunteers to the local Nikkei communities. MOFA is also working to further strengthen relationships with Nikkei communities based on the report submitted to the Minister for Foreign Affairs from the Panel of Experts on Collaborating with Nikkei Communities in Latin America and the Caribbean in May 2017.

Thus far, invitation programs to Japan for Nikkei leaders in various fields, and from various countries and regions, have been carried out in North, Central and South America. In addition, efforts are underway to strengthen relations with Nikkei people in these regions through close cooperation between the diplomatic missions in each country and Nikkei communities, including actively creating opportunities for senior officials from Japan to meet with Nikkei persons during their visits to these countries.

In 2021, the 61st Convention of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad was held virtually due to the impact of COVID-19. Accordingly, the welcome reception hosted by the Foreign Minister was cancelled. However, like the online forum held in 2020, a video message from Foreign Minister Motegi was played. Going forward, along with providing support to Japanese abroad and Nikkei people, MOFA will promote cooperation with the younger generation and strengthen their bonds with Japan.

#### 4 The Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (the Hague Convention) and its Implementation

The Hague Convention is designed as an international mechanism for addressing disputes arising from the wrongful removal or retention of children across borders in the belief that the interests of children are of paramount importance. It requires cooperation between Contracting States to the Convention for returning children to their state of habitual residence and establishing opportunities for transboundary parent-child access.

This Convention came into force in Japan on April 1, 2014. As of December 31, 2021, 101 countries including Japan are parties to the Convention.

The Convention is implemented through mutual cooperation among the governmental agencies designated as the Central Authority in Contracting States to the Convention. In Japan, MOFA as the Central Authority avails itself of experts in various fields and provides assistance to both the parent whose child was removed and the parent who removed the child for the resolution of child removal cases, in communication and cooperation with foreign Central Authorities.

In the seven years and nine months between the entry into force of the Convention and the end of December 2021, MOFA received a total number of 468 applications: 302 applications seeking the return of the child and 166 applications seeking access to the child. Of the cases seeking the return of the child from Japan to another country,

children were returned in 55 cases and conclusions were reached not to return the child in 43 cases. Of the cases requesting the return of the child from another country to Japan, children were returned in 53 cases and conclusions were reached not to return the child in 29 cases.

In March 2021, MOFA, together with the Hague Conference on Private International Law, co-hosted the “Web Seminar on the 1980 Hague Convention in the Asia Pacific” with a view to strengthening cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region on the Hague Convention. It was attended by judges and officials of Central Authorities from 12 countries and regions.

In addition, in order to make the Hague Convention known to a broad public, MOFA sent leaflets on the Hague Convention (electronic version) to our Embassies and Consulates and posted them on our websites. It also holds online seminars to raise awareness among Japanese nationals living overseas, as well as seminars in Japan for local governments and relevant institutions such as bar associations. MOFA also puts efforts into PR activities by creating awareness-raising videos on the Hague Convention and posting them on MOFA's website and video-sharing platforms.

**Number of Applications for Assistance Received by the MOFA Based on the Implementation Act of the Hague Convention (as of the end of December 2021)**

	Application for assistance in child's return	Application for assistance in visitation or contacts with child
Applications related to children located in Japan	164	126
Applications related to children located overseas	138	40

## Measures Against Loneliness and Isolation Among Japanese Expatriates — “Undesirable Loneliness” as a Cross-Border Issue

Ozora Koki, CEO, NPO “Anata no ibasho” (IbashoChat.org)

In February, Japan appointed a Minister for Loneliness and Isolation and launched measures to counter the issue. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan was already facing a serious situation with regard to problems such as suicide, child abuse, and domestic violence (DV). One of the factors behind this situation was the “undesirable loneliness” that came from not having anyone to rely on. However, this problem further manifested when interpersonal bonds were cut off during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have set up a chat consultation service that everyone can use free of charge and anonymously regardless of their age and sex, and which offers advice and support around the clock, every day of the year, to those facing “undesirable loneliness.” With volunteer counselors living overseas participating in this activity, we have built a 24-hour consultation support system by having these volunteers respond to consultations during the night and late-night hours when the number of consultations reaches its peak. In March, soon after our proposal for the government to work as one to address loneliness and isolation was accepted and the corresponding measures were launched in Japan, the counselors received a consultation from a Japanese child living abroad who was being abused by a parent. Due to the nature of chat consultations, although we had previously received consultations from Japanese nationals overseas, this was the first time we had received a consultation that called for emergency response (crisis intervention in collaboration with child consultation centers, police and other parties). However, Japan’s child consultation centers are unable to respond to child abuse cases involving Japanese nationals overseas, and we were also unable to encourage inquirers who did not understand the local language to approach the local authorities and support organizations for assistance. Moreover, private-sector consultation services like ours did not have a system for communicating with MOFA or diplomatic missions overseas. We were literally at our wits’ end.

Of course, problems such as suicide, child abuse, and DV also arise among Japanese nationals overseas. This group is particularly susceptible to loneliness and isolation partly because they face difficulties such as language and cultural barriers as well as differences in lifestyles. In fact, the second most common cause of death for Japanese nationals overseas is suicide (Source: 2020 Statistics on Assistance Provided by MOFA to Japanese Nationals Overseas). MOFA provides various forms of assistance through its diplomatic missions overseas, but it is necessary to further strengthen measures, including cooperation with private organizations, to address the problem of loneliness and isolation among Japanese nationals overseas. In view of that, we submitted a request to Foreign Minister Motegi on measures to address loneliness and isolation among Japanese nationals overseas, and proposed that MOFA commence reviews on concrete measures. As a result, since July, MOFA has been working in cooperation with five domestic consultation services, including “Anata no ibasho,” to provide information on these consultation services to Japanese nationals overseas. Inquirers who require emergency assistance are supported through the use of a communication system established between the MOFA Headquarters and the consultation service providers. There were actual cases in which emergency response was undertaken, and the measures to address loneliness and isolation among Japanese nationals overseas are gradually producing results. Since the launch of this initiative, our consultation service has been responding to consultations from about 200 Japanese nationals overseas every month.



The author (right) submitting the request on measures to address loneliness and isolation among Japanese nationals abroad, to Foreign Minister Motegi

There are also cases where calls from Japanese nationals living in the United States are answered by Japanese volunteer counselors living in the United Kingdom, for example. "Undesirable loneliness" is a problem that extends across national borders, so the provision of support is similarly borderless. We will continue to put our best efforts into providing consultation support, so that the cooperation between MOFA and our global network of counselors can be even more effective toward eradicating "undesirable loneliness" among Japanese nationals abroad.



A 24-hour consultation support center in Tokyo