

Around 75% of Japanese see need to make nation more hospitable for foreign residents, government survey shows

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A large majority of Japanese believe the nation needs to create a more welcoming environment for foreign residents, but that it should remain prudent in letting more refugees into the country, a government survey has shown.

The Cabinet Office released on Friday the results of a public survey conducted every five years. This year it included, for the first time, questions about refugees and foreign residents.

Seventy-four percent of respondents said the country needs to enhance living conditions for foreign residents, pointing to a need to strengthen points of contact for consulting on matters related to daily life, such as residence status procedures, medical treatment, child care and legal protection to ensure safe working environments, as well as multilingual support and disaster preparedness.

Officials said performing the survey became necessary after an amendment to the immigration law took effect in April 2019, opening the door for more than 345,000 foreign laborers to enter the country over a five-year period to mitigate depopulation and ease concerns about the future of the world's third-biggest economy.

Fifty-four percent thought the number of refugees taken in by Japan was low. In a separate question, however, 56 percent said the country should be careful about taking in more refugees, with many citing concerns about crime, cultural assimilation and an influx in refugees putting a burden on public funds.

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the number of applications for refugee status made by people seeking to work here, an official of the Immigration Services Agency told members of the press on Thursday.

Eriko Suzuki, a professor at Kokushikan University and vice chair of nonprofit group Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, praised the government for its move to gauge for the first time public views on the need to offer an environment where foreign residents can live comfortably in Japan. She added that the survey clearly shows the public's awareness of the need for foreign residents, and added that it is necessary to reconsider the current system if Japan wants to accept foreign residents as equal members of society.

The public's view of the death penalty remains static, the report showed, with 80 percent of respondents saying that they were in favor of it and only 9 percent saying they felt it should be scrapped. In a previous survey conducted in 2014, 80 percent of respondents

supported capital punishment.

The most recent survey was carried out at the request of the Immigration Services Agency and involved individual interviews with more than 1,500 Japanese citizens above 18 years of age over a 10-day period in November.

“We hope this information will be helpful to policymakers as they consider how to approach these different issues,” the ISA official said.