

7 Improving Working Environment

While values regarding lifestyle and work styles diversify, the NPA is working to promote more flexible work styles that allow employees to work at time and place that suits their wishes and circumstances so that they can work with a sense of fulfillment and vitality.

The NPA is also working to reduce overtime, improve the health of employees, and realize a harassment-free workplace.



Working Hours System

Outline of Working Hours System

National public employees are not covered by the Labor Standards Act but are subject to the Working Hours Act to facilitate the operation of the public service. With the aim of securing appropriate working conditions for the employees, the NPA makes recommendations to adjust working hours, etc. in accordance with the general conditions of society and develops various types of systems.

The employees' working hours are 38 hours and 45 minutes per week and 7 hours and 45 minutes per day in principle. A flextime system covers all employees in principle, and they are allowed to flexibly set their working hours. The employees engaged in services which should be offered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, such as prison officers and coast guard officers, work under the shift work system.

Promotion of institutional reforms to implement flexible work styles

■ Review of flextime system

In order to further enable individual employees to secure their health and work in accordance with their wishes and circumstances, the NPA revised the flextime system so that employees are able to set up to one day per week which working hours are not allocated to, to take effect from April 2025.

■ Ensuring intervals between working hours

It is essential for maintaining good health to secure sufficient time for sleep and other activities by setting intervals between working hours, and is also important for pursuing a work-life balance. Therefore, ministries and agencies have been obliged to make efforts to ensure intervals between working hours since April 2024. The NPA will promote taking the necessary measures to ensure the intervals in cooperation with other ministries and agencies.

■ Review of a span of period for taking summer leave and usage credit of annual leave

From 2024, the period of summer leave for employees who have difficulty taking it during the period from July to September due to work-related reasons has been extended by one month before and after the period. Furthermore, annual leave for shift employees can now be taken in increments of 15 minutes, in addition to days and hours.

■ Establishment of Telework Guidelines

It is believed that making the workplaces of national public employees more flexible through the use of telework will contribute to improving the efficiency of public service and the attractiveness of their workplace. In order to expand telework in public service workplace and ensure its appropriate and fair operation, the NPA, in cooperation with the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs, established the Telework Guidelines as a unified standard in FY2023.

Reduction of Overtime Work

Long overtime work not only affect the health of individual employees and their work efficiency but also make the public service less attractive for younger generations to choose as a workplace. Therefore, the NPA is making efforts from many dimensions to reduce overtime work as one of its most important issues.

Establishment of Upper Limit of Maximum Overtime Work

- ▶ The upper limit of maximum overtime work has been stipulated in the NPA rule as follows.

General rule	Sections/Units handling duties whose volume or deadline are beyond the control of the head of department	
45 hours or less per month	Less than 100 hours per month	Monthly average for the duration of 2 to 6 months should be 80 hours or less.
360 hours or less per year	720 hours or less per year	Overtime work for more than 45 hours per month should be 6 months or less per year.

Overtime work is permitted to be ordered beyond the above limits only when dealing with important and especially urgent duties such as responding to large-scale disasters, drafting the laws related to important policies, important negotiations with foreign countries or international organizations, and so forth. When the upper limit is exceeded, each ministry and agency are required to conduct verification afterwards.

- ▶ In order to instruct thoroughly toward the goal of reducing overtime work, the Office of Investigation and Guidance on Working Hours, which was newly established in April 2022, instructs ministries and agencies to properly manage overtime hours based on objectively recorded time in office.

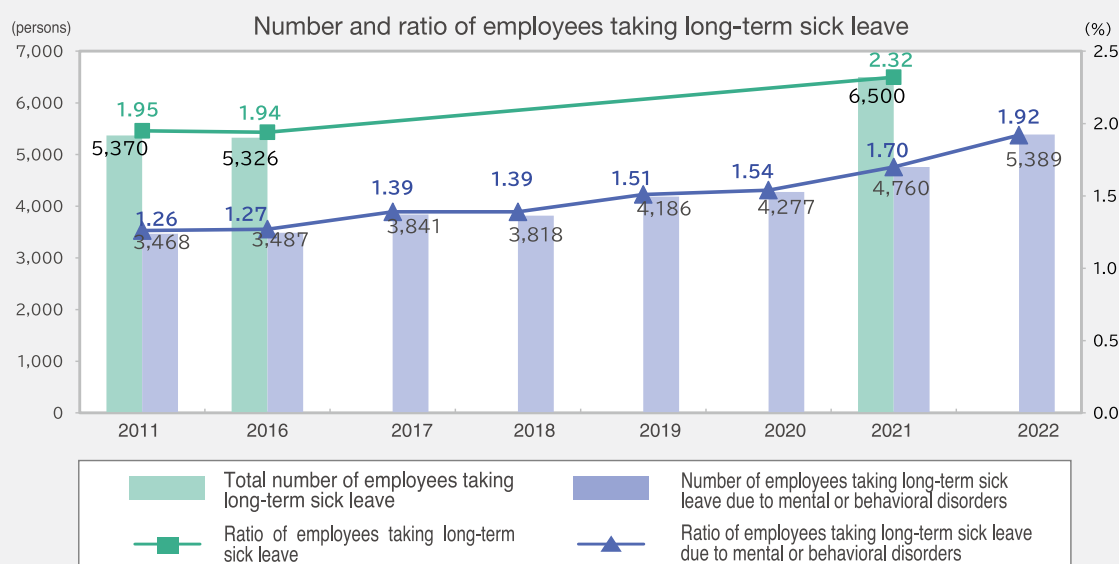
Promotion of Measures for Mental Health Development

In order to realize the wellbeing of employees, it is extremely important to improve their own health, and we are working to improve health management systems and promote effective health management measures in each ministry and agency.

In addition, the number of cases involving mental health problem accounts for more than 70% of all long-term sick leave cases, the rate of person who take long-term sick leave due to mental health problem is rising year by year. Therefore, the NPA is actively promoting mental health measures for national public employees.

<Main Measures>

- ◆ The NPA considers strengthening the health management system in each ministry and agency.
- ◆ Holding “Counseling Office for Mental Health Care” offered by physicians, etc. (10 locations nationwide). Online consultation is extended to all regional bureaus from FY2023 and its expanded usage is encouraged.
- ◆ Implementation of a stress check system and support of measures to improve working environments
- ◆ Raising awareness of mental health through training and self-learning materials
- ◆ Facilitating smooth return to work using a program called “Going to Work on a Trial Basis”



Systems to Support the Balance Between Pregnancy, Childbirth, Childcare, Nursing Care and Work

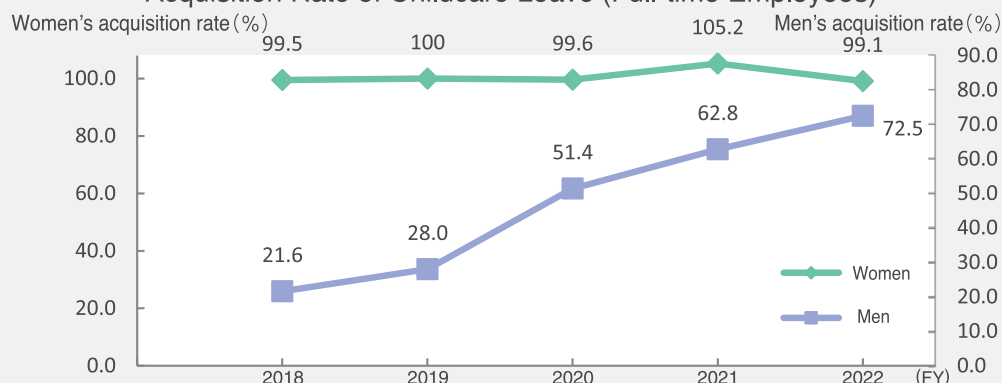
In order to create a workplace where everyone can fulfill their abilities, it is necessary to have a system that enables both men and women to continue to work without any anxiety while taking care of their children and other family members. Based on these circumstances, the NPA works hard to improve various types of support systems, including childcare leave and nursing leave. The amendment of Child-Care Leave Act became effective in October 2022 and it has become possible for employees to take childcare leave up to two times in principle (In addition, postpartum childcare leave for fathers can be taken up to two times). The NPA is raising awareness among employees through publication and distribution of leaflets.

Leaves	
Childcare leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until a child becomes 3 years old (up to two times, in principle) (In addition, postpartum childcare leave for fathers can be taken up to two times)
Nursing leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 months or less per family member (can be taken in up to three instalments) (Re-acquisition is possible for each condition requiring care needs.)
Childcare short-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until a child enters elementary school (Half-day work, etc.)
Childcare hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until a child enters elementary school (Up to 2 hours a day)
Nursing hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 years or less per family member (Up to 2 hours a day) (Re-acquisition is possible for each condition requiring care needs)
Childcare Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Until the child becomes 1 year old (Twice a day for up to 30 minutes each)
Birth Support Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 days/year for hospital visits, etc. for infertility treatment (5 additional days if undergoing IVF or ICSI)
Prenatal and Postnatal Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before delivery: 6 weeks before the estimated delivery date Postpartum: 8 weeks after the day of birth
Spouse Childbirth Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 days during the period from the date of wife's hospitalization for childbirth until 2 weeks after the day of birth
Leave for participating in childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 days during the period from the day 6 weeks before the estimated delivery date until the child becomes 1 year old
Leave for nursing children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 days (until a child enters elementary school) 10 days if the employee concerned has 2 or more children
Short-term nursing leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 days a year (10 days if the employee concerned has 2 or more family members in care-requiring condition)
※ : Unpaid : Paid	

Changes in Working Hours	Avoidance of Overtime Work/Late-night Work
Flextime system for employees engaged in childcare and nursing care	Restriction on late-night work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be shortened up to 4 hours a day Employees can take another day off in addition to Saturday and Sunday ※ More flexible than the usual flextime system 	Restriction on overtime work
Early or late work starting time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 24 hours a month and up to 150 hours a year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees can choose a working pattern they want from various options. 	Exemption from overtime work

The purpose of the work-life balance support system is not only to enable employees to take care of children but also to allow employees to develop their career, maximize their long-term performance and to contribute to efficient public administration. The NPA is committed to promoting childcare by male employees, and in FY2022, the percentage of male employees who newly started childcare leave exceeded 70% for the first time.

Acquisition Rate of Childcare Leave (Full-time Employees)



Source : "Survey concerning the Use of Work-life Balance Support-related Systems" (FY2018 to FY2022)
 Note : The "Acquisition Rate" in FY2022 is the percentage of the number of employees who newly started childcare leave in FY2022 (a) to the number of employees whose child was born in FY2022 (limited to employees eligible for childcare leave) (b) (a/b). "a" includes employees whose child was born before FY2022 and newly started childcare leave in FY2022. Therefore, the acquisition rate may exceed 100%.

A Symposium on Balancing Infertility Treatment and Work

Birth support leave was introduced in January 2022 to support the balance between infertility treatment and work. In order to promote the use of the leave, the NPA distributes leaflets and Q&As about the leave, holds symposiums on balancing infertility treatment and work, and takes other necessary measures to create a workplace environment that encourages the use of the leave.



▲ Scene of a symposium (February 2023)

Promotion of Preventive Measures against Harassment

The public sector has been taking the lead in implementing measures against harassment to create a working environment where everyone is respected.

"Power Harassment" (Abuse of Authority in Workplaces)

In April 2020, the NPA Rule 10-16 (Prevention of power harassment, etc.) was enacted to take measures to prevent power harassment (effective from June 2020).

- ▶ It stipulates that the employees shall not commit power harassment.
- ▶ It makes it mandatory for each ministry and agency to prevent power harassment and to provide their employees with relief.
- ▶ Distributed a training video to each ministry and agency which included visualization and explanations of possible cases related to power harassment.



Sexual Harassment and Harassment regarding Pregnancy, Childbirth, Childcare, or Nursing Care

In conjunction with the enactment of the NPA Rule 10-16 in 2020, NPA Rule 10-10 (Prevention of sexual harassment, etc.) and NPA Rule 10-15 (Prevention of harassment related to pregnancy, childbirth, childcare or nursing care) were also amended, in which the duty of employees changed from a simple requirement of a duty of care ("must be careful not to engage in harassment") in the prior provision, to a provision of prohibition ("must not engage in harassment").



Harassment Prevention Week

- ▶ Dec. 4 to Dec.10 every year is designated as "Harassment Prevention Week". During the week, each ministry and agency is called on to take measures on harassment, and the NPA also holds a seminar related to the topic.
- ▶ The NPA prepares training materials for self-study with the goal to raise all employees' awareness about basic matters related to harassment, and distributes them to each ministry and agency.

Promotion of Safety Management Measures

The NPA promotes safety management at the workplace, for instance through distributing an overview of accidents that occurred in the past in order to prevent the recurrence of similar accidents; and providing guidance to thoroughly implement preventive measures against serious accidents, especially fatal accidents.

Operation of Accident Compensation System

The objectives of the Accident Compensation System are to provide compensation for damages caused by the accidents that employees experience in the course of duty (accident on duty) or during commuting to and from work (accident while commuting); and to provide afflicted employees with a welfare service to facilitate their return to work, etc.

Each ministry and agency directly engages in compensation and welfare services. Meanwhile, the NPA is responsible for the establishment of the standards, guidance and comprehensive coordination to help each ministry and agency carry out such compensation and welfare services.