

## Article

# Analysis of Regular Employees Whose Inclination to Change Jobs Has Increased in the COVID-19 Pandemic

TAKAHASHI Koji

## 1. Background: The increase in the rate of regular employees inclined to change jobs

While the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a decline in the percentage of workers changing employers (referred to here as “job change”), there has been a rise in the percentage of regular employees inclined to change jobs. This analysis addresses said trend by exploring what characterizes those regular employees who have become more inclined to change jobs. The results reveal that people whose work has been reduced as part of measures to adapt to the pandemic have become more inclined to change jobs as they wish to work to their full potential.

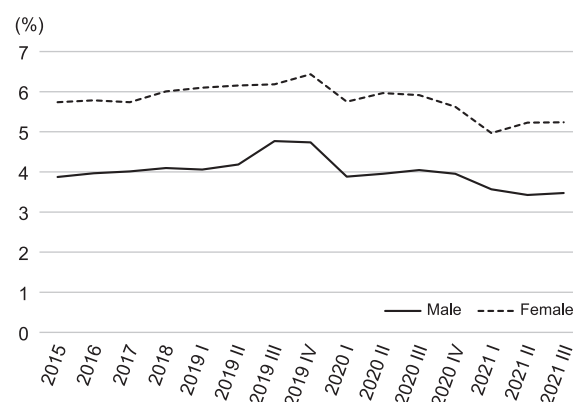
The pandemic has seen changes in the nature of job change and workers’ attitudes toward it. Figure 1 presents the trends in the percentage of workers changing jobs (job change rate) based on data from the *Labour Force Survey* by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. This shows that the job change rate, which was on an upward trend from 2015 to 2019, has declined among men and women since the beginning of 2020. This is thought to be attributable to the decrease in the number of job vacancies advertised by enterprises which has resulted from the stagnation of economic activity in the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing again on data from the *Labour Force Survey*, Figure 2 shows the trends in the rate of workers who are inclined to change jobs. Looking firstly at the graph of trends by sex, it can be seen that while the job change rate has declined during the pandemic, the rate of workers inclined to change

jobs has remained at a similar level or been on the increase. The graph presenting trends by employment type shows that the rate of regular employees inclined to change jobs has likewise been on the increase in the pandemic.



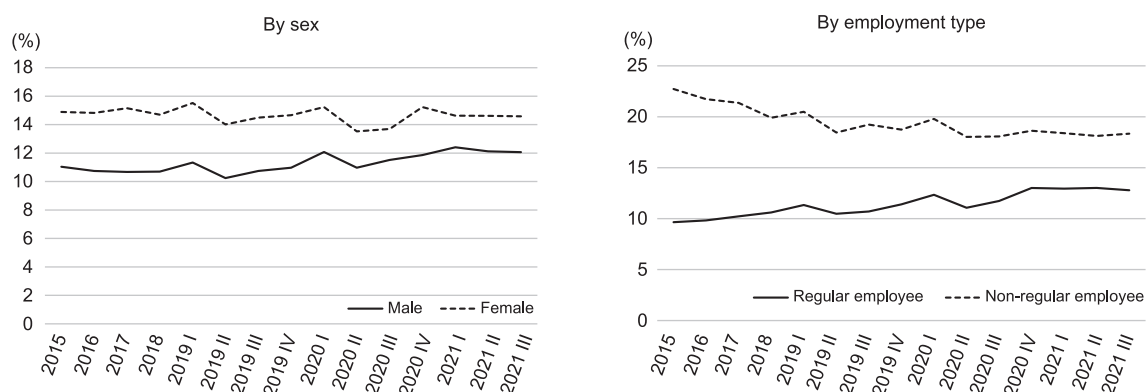
That is, focusing specifically on regular employees, the above trend indicates that in a labor market in which there is generally little job change, only the rate of those inclined to change jobs is on the increase. This poses the research question of what characterizes such regular employees who have become more inclined to change jobs during the pandemic—namely, amid difficulty in changing



Source: *Labour Force Survey*, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Note: The figure shows the number of people who changed jobs (changed employers) as a percentage of the total number of employed people at each survey timing. As “people who changed jobs” refers to those who left their employment and entered new employment within the one year prior to the survey, in some cases, the actual timing of the job change was a year previously.

Figure 1. Trends in the job change rate



Source: Labour Force Survey, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Notes: 1. The graphs show the numbers of people who responded that they are “inclined to change job, etc.” (“*tenshoku nado wo kibō shite iru*”) as a percentage of the numbers of employed people at each survey timing.

2. “Regular employees” refer to those who are called “regular employees” in their workplace, excluding management executives. All other employees are treated as “non-regular employees.”

Figure 2. Trends in the rate of workers inclined to change jobs

jobs due to the dwindling numbers of vacancies. This analysis explores the characteristics of and conditions affecting those regular employees who have become more inclined to change jobs in the pandemic, as well as seeking to identify what kind of approach to working they wish to pursue after changing jobs.

## 2. Analysis using data from the JILPT panel survey of individuals

This analysis seeks to answer the questions posed above by drawing on data from the “JILPT Panel Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Work and Daily Life.” This panel survey of individuals has built on the Rengo Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards (RENGO-RIALS)’ “39th Short-Term Survey of Workers in Japan” (April 2020), by surveying the same respondents, in five survey waves conducted in May, August, and December 2020, and March and June 2021, respectively.<sup>2</sup> The survey subjects are divided into employees of private enterprises or freelance workers as of April 1, 2020. In the case of employees of private enterprises, who are the focus of this analysis, subjects were allocated from respondents registered with an online survey company using stratified sampling by sex, age group, residential region, and regular/non-regular employee status (by 180 cells), based on data from

the *Employment Status Survey*.<sup>3</sup>

The subjects of the analysis in this paper are people who were regular employees of private enterprises as of April 1, 2020, who did not subsequently become separated from their employment or change jobs prior to the fifth wave (June 2021), and who responded to the RENGO-RIALS survey and all five waves of the JILPT panel survey. While the analysis in this paper draws mainly on the questions from the fifth wave, the subjects of analysis are limited to those who responded to all surveys, including the RENGO-RIALS’ survey, given the possibility of differing tendencies in respondents’ responses depending on the timing at which they joined the sample.

The fifth wave of the JILPT panel survey addresses changes in respondents’ attitudes amid the pandemic. More specifically, it includes a question asking respondents about how the importance they attach to certain items has changed in comparison with prior to the onset of the pandemic (“In contrast with prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have the following items become important to you?”). The 11 items listed in this question include an “environment conducive to changing jobs” (job change conducive environment). This question is used to ascertain the increase (or decrease) in the inclination toward changing jobs among respondents. Namely, those who responded that a job change

conductive environment became “much more important” or “slightly more important” to them can be considered to have become more inclined to change jobs, and those who responded that it became “slightly less important” or “much less important” can be seen to be less inclined to change jobs.

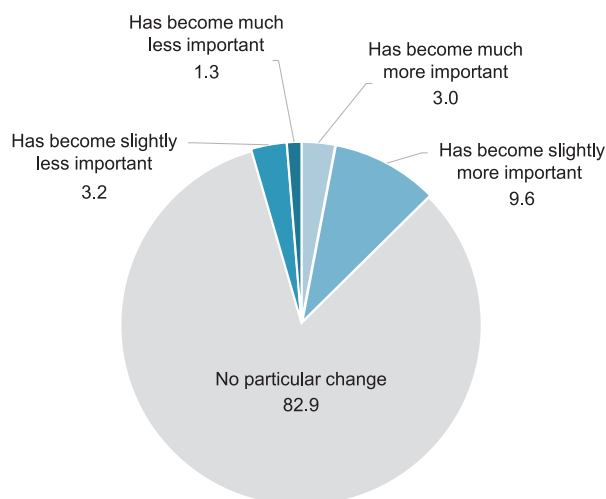
### 3. Changes in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment

Figure 3 shows the changes in perceptions of the importance of a job change conducive environment as compared with prior to the onset of the pandemic. The subjects of analysis are regular employees who have not become separated from their employment or changed jobs during the pandemic. While 82.9% of all respondents felt that there was “no particular change” in their perception of the importance of such an environment, it is notable that the percentage of respondents for whom it had become more important was 12.6% (3.0% + 9.6%), in contrast with the 4.5% (1.3% + 3.2%) for whom it had become less important. Although this cannot be described as a dramatic shift, it certainly confirms a growing inclination among regular employees toward changing jobs.

It must be noted that what can be ascertained from the changes in the perception of the importance of a job change conducive environment is whether there has been a relative (as compared with prior to

the onset of the pandemic) increase or decrease in the inclination toward changing jobs. Therefore, even those who responded that such an environment has become more important to them may have a low inclination toward changing jobs.

Figure 4 addresses this by looking at the correlation between the change in the perception of



*Note:* The question reads: “In contrast with prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have the following items become important to you?” This figure shows responses regarding the item: “an environment conducive to changing jobs.”

Figure 3. Change in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment as compared with prior to the onset of the pandemic (N=1,434; %)

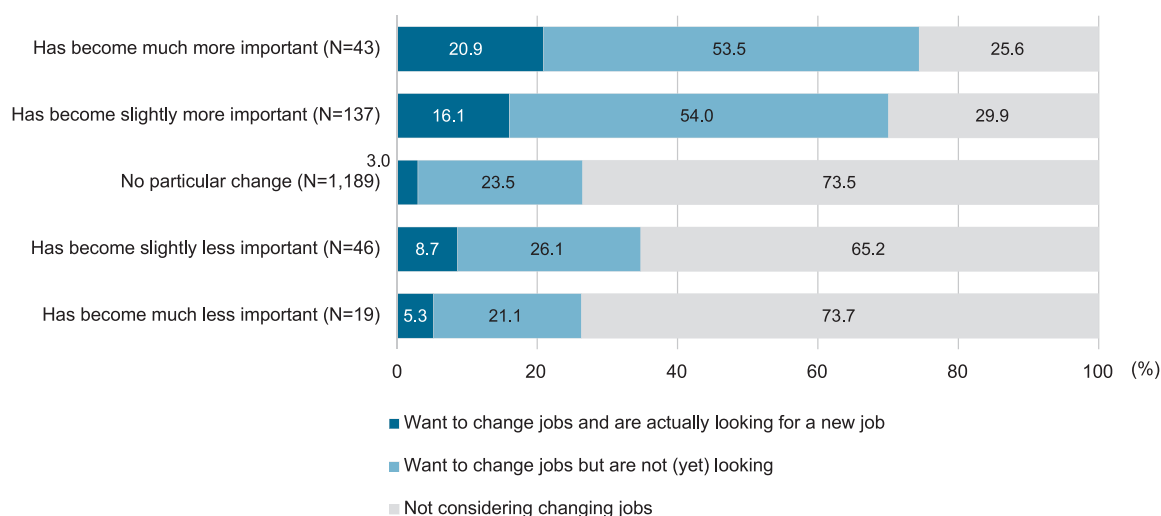


Figure 4. Change in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment and intention to change jobs at the time of the survey

importance of a job change conducive environment and the intention to change jobs at the timing of the fifth wave of the JILPT panel survey. The results show that over 70% of those who responded that a job change conducive environment became “much more important” or “slightly more important” responded that they want to change jobs. This confirms that many people for whom a job change conducive environment has become more important have a greater inclination toward changing jobs to the extent that they are in fact intending to change jobs.

#### **4. Characteristics of regular employees to whom a job change conducive environment has become more important**

Now let us look at what characterizes the regular employees to whom a job change conducive environment has become more important—namely, who have a stronger inclination to change jobs. Table 1 presents the results of an ordinal logistic regression analysis using change in the perception of the importance of a job change conducive environment as the explained variable. The more the perceived importance has increased, the greater the value of the explained variable.

In Model 1, sex, age, educational background, and whether the respondent is responsible for earning a livelihood (“breadwinner”) are adopted as explanatory variables. This indicates that among younger respondents, there is a tendency to increase the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment which is significant at the 0.01 level.

In Model 2, industry, occupation, and size of enterprise are additionally incorporated as explanatory variables. However, none of these variables have a significant effect on the explained variable, and the model itself is not significant.

Model 3 additionally incorporates the measures being taken in response to COVID-19 by the respondents’ employers (the enterprises that employ them) at the fifth wave of the JILPT panel survey (respondents are allowed to select multiple responses) as explanatory variables. This shows that where the measures “suspending business (e.g., shutdown, closure, etc.) or increasing non-business days” or

“reduction of work” have been adopted, there is a significant increase in the perception of the importance of a job change conducive environment.

Model 4 additionally incorporates the most recent working hours and monthly salary data from the fifth wave as explanatory variables. This indicates that the rise and decline in monthly salary has a negative influence at the 0.05 level. That is, people whose monthly salary has declined tend to perceive a job change conducive environment as more important.

It is incidentally also necessary to note that in Model 4, the coefficient for “suspending business (e.g., shutdown, closure, etc.) and/or increasing non-business days” is not significant, which suggests that the impact of business suspension is in fact the impact of the decline in salary due to the business suspension.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, “reduction of work” remains significant at the 0.01 level in Model 4 as well. This means that “reduction of work” has an effect on the explained variables that is unconnected with the decline in monthly salary. Namely, the reduction of work itself prompts regular employees to consider a job change conducive environment more important.

In summary, this analysis indicates that younger regular employees, regular employees whose work has been reduced, and regular employees whose monthly salary has declined tend to have developed a stronger inclination toward changing jobs.

#### **5. Respondents’ thoughts on working style once the pandemic has been resolved**

Let us now look at what kinds of working styles the regular employees who see greater importance in a job change conducive environment—namely, who have a stronger inclination to change jobs—wish to pursue after changing jobs. Figure 5 presents respondents’ thoughts on the way in which they would like to work once the pandemic has been resolved, as an indicator closely resembling respondents’ intended ways of work after changing jobs.

This indicates that those respondents to whom a job change conducive environment has become more important tend to respond that they “want to

Table 1. Determinants of change in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment (ordinal logistic regression analysis)

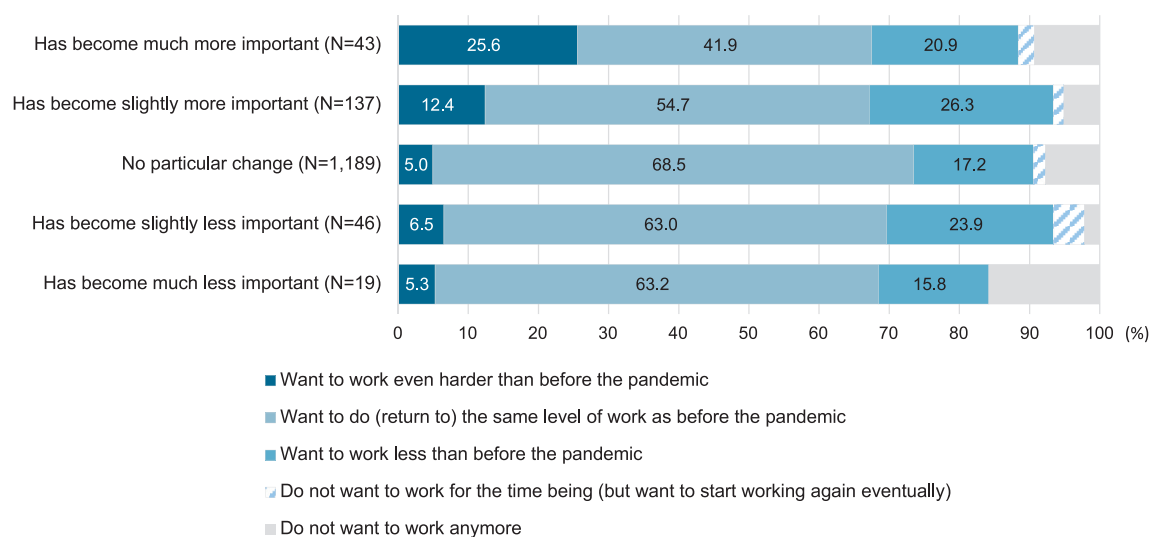
Explained variable: Change in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment (5. It has become much more important – 1. It has become much less important)	Model ①		Model ②		Model ③		Model ④	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Female	0.095	0.170	0.060	0.194	0.085	0.197	0.074	0.197
Age	-0.029	0.007 **	-0.029	0.008 **	-0.027	0.008 **	-0.027	0.008 **
University graduate or higher	0.056	0.144	0.150	0.158	0.214	0.161	0.222	0.161
Breadwinner	-0.244	0.185	-0.264	0.189	-0.238	0.193	-0.232	0.193
Construction (ref. Manufacturing)			0.004	0.318	0.098	0.325	0.095	0.327
Information and communications			-0.221	0.312	-0.134	0.321	-0.127	0.321
Transport			-0.415	0.344	-0.547	0.347	-0.556	0.347
Wholesale and retail trade			0.001	0.277	0.029	0.285	0.046	0.286
Finance and insurance			-0.420	0.340	-0.403	0.347	-0.400	0.348
Real estate			-0.370	0.466	-0.292	0.469	-0.278	0.472
Accommodation and food services			0.129	0.623	-0.066	0.644	-0.074	0.645
Medical, health care and welfare			0.171	0.290	0.203	0.301	0.233	0.302
Education, learning support			-0.016	0.605	0.071	0.612	0.003	0.612
Services (not elsewhere classified)			0.048	0.268	-0.017	0.273	-0.001	0.273
Other industries or "Do not know"			0.076	0.360	0.104	0.366	0.136	0.367
Managerial workers (ref. Clerical workers)			-0.008	0.259	-0.046	0.262	-0.069	0.262
Professional and engineering workers			-0.112	0.233	-0.130	0.236	-0.152	0.237
Sales workers			-0.007	0.262	-0.051	0.268	-0.078	0.269
Service workers			0.407	0.344	0.475	0.352	0.421	0.353
Production/skilled workers			-0.190	0.306	-0.355	0.315	-0.397	0.315
Transport and machine operation drivers			0.777	0.461	0.698	0.465	0.626	0.467
Carrying, cleaning and packaging workers			0.690	0.473	0.897	0.482	0.880	0.483
Other occupations or "Do not know"			-0.316	0.421	-0.313	0.428	-0.324	0.430
99 or fewer employees (ref. 1,000 or more employees)			0.050	0.185	0.051	0.196	0.063	0.197
100–999 employees			-0.204	0.186	-0.244	0.190	-0.246	0.191
Do not know			-0.145	0.447	-0.043	0.456	-0.033	0.457
Suspending business (e.g., shutdown, closure, etc.) or increasing non-business days					0.645	0.306 *	0.552	0.309
Shortening business hours					-0.161	0.304	-0.201	0.304
Temporary leave					0.839	0.455	0.794	0.455
Reduction of workdays					0.332	0.314	0.326	0.315
Encouragement of taking paid leave					0.315	0.238	0.306	0.238
Implementation of working from home/ telework					-0.120	0.212	-0.101	0.212
Changing workplace to an alternative location other than the default workplace					-0.768	0.399	-0.762	0.400
Change in commuting method					-0.316	0.407	-0.324	0.407
Staggering work hours					-0.112	0.226	-0.121	0.226
Reduction of work					1.173	0.318 **	1.116	0.320 **
Use of web or video conferencing					0.389	0.211	0.395	0.212
Cancellation or restriction of business trips					-0.283	0.221	-0.303	0.222
Suspension or termination of transfers					0.633	0.464	0.687	0.466
Dispatching staff to other companies					0.253	0.607	0.207	0.607
Cancellation or voluntary restraint of events, meetings, conferences, roundtables, etc.					0.003	0.205	0.004	0.206
Appropriate response to people with symptoms such as cough and fever					0.143	0.207	0.125	0.208
Preparation and provision of masks, alcohol-based disinfectant, and face shields					-0.235	0.191	-0.210	0.192
Change in working hours (increase/decrease in number of hours)							0.000	0.007
Change in monthly income (index: pre-pandemic =100)							-0.013	0.005 *
$\tau=1$	-5.797	0.445 **	-5.885	0.526 **	-5.806	0.543 **	-7.054	0.756 **
$\tau=2$	-4.533	0.400 **	-4.618	0.489 **	-4.534	0.507 **	-5.783	0.730 **
$\tau=3$	0.549	0.360	0.519	0.455	0.738	0.474	-0.490	0.697
$\tau=4$	2.100	0.382 **	2.078	0.473 **	2.323	0.492 **	1.100	0.707
N		1434		1434		1434		1434
Chi-square		23.776 **		38.311		75.412 **		80.893 **
Nagelkerke R-square		0.023		0.036		0.070		0.075

Notes: 1. \*\* $p<0.01$ , \* $p<0.05$ . (ref.) denotes the reference group.

2. Industry, occupation, and size of enterprise refer to those as of April 1, 2020.

3. Increase or decrease in working hours (number of hours) is calculated by subtracting the actual weekly hours worked in a normal month prior to the pandemic from the most recent actual weekly hours worked from the fifth wave of the JILPT panel survey (June 17–23, 2021).

4. Increase or decrease in monthly salary (index: pre-pandemic = 100) is based on responses to a question from the fifth wave of the JILPT panel survey in which respondents were asked to select from nine categories to indicate how their most recent monthly salary compares with their original monthly salary (in a normal month) prior to the pandemic. Responses were converted to class values.



*Note:* The value labels for “do not want to work for the time being (but want to start working again eventually)” and “do not want to work anymore” have been omitted from the figure.

Figure 5. Change in the perceived importance of a job change conducive environment and desired ways of working once the pandemic is resolved

work even harder than before the pandemic.” This echoes the trend shown in Table 1—which reveals that those whose work has been reduced as a part of the response to the pandemic have developed a stronger inclination to change jobs—and it seems linked to the trend that those who have a stronger inclination to change jobs tend to wish to work to their full potential once the pandemic is resolved.

## 6. Key Findings: Regular employees with a greater inclination to change jobs are characterized by a desire to work harder

While the job change rate has seen a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of regular employees inclined to change jobs has increased. This analysis to explore what kinds of regular employees have become more inclined to change jobs reveals that people whose work has been reduced as part of the response to the pandemic have become more inclined to change jobs as they are keen to work to their full potential.

Under calls for Work Style Reform, Japan has seen efforts to ensure the implementation of measures to reduce long working hours and achieve work-life balance for regular employees. Likewise, the key aims of telework, which is increasingly being

introduced in the pandemic, include not only curbing the percentage of employees commuting to work, but also allowing work to be pursued efficiently. At the same time, as shown in this analysis, a certain proportion of regular employees, presumably feeling that their work has been reduced against their will, are keen to change jobs in order to work to their full potential. Such people appear to be contributing significantly to the rise in the percentage of regular employees inclined to change jobs.

1. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s “Report on Employment Service” (statistics on public employment placement services) shows that having risen from 1.20 in 2015 (annual average) to 1.60 in 2019 (annual average), the ratio of job vacancies to applicants (including part-time positions; seasonally adjusted values) saw a sharp decline in May 2020 to 1.18, recorded a low level of 1.04 in September to October 2020, and remains low at 1.16 in the most recent figures from September 2021.
2. In each survey wave where the sample fell short of the overall target number, additional subjects were surveyed to supplement the sample.
3. For a detailed summary of the survey implementation and preliminary report of survey results, see JILPT (2021).
4. The data does not cover whether a leave allowance was paid. However, as leave allowance is included in the monthly salary, if a leave allowance has not been paid, the extent of the decline in monthly salary is greater.

## Reference

JILPT. 2021. Results of the “JILPT Panel Survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Work and Daily Life” (June 2021, 5th wave) (First Aggregation). <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/special/covid-19/survey/documents/20210727.pdf>.

## **TAKAHASHI Koji**

Senior Researcher, The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training. Research interest: Non-regular employment.

<https://www.jil.go.jp/english/profile/takahashi.html>