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Japan's food service visa quota remained 98.2% full in August

JITCO said the slight decline from July left the Specified Skilled Worker route effectively full after new entry certificates were suspended

Tuesday, November 10, 2026

Japan’s food service sector filled 98.2% of its intake ceiling under the country’s Specified Skilled Worker Type 1 program as of the end of August, down slightly from 98.6% at the end of July, according to an update published by JITCO on Monday, November 9. For restaurants and other hospitality operators that use the program to hire foreign workers, the change means the sector remains effectively at capacity even after the small monthly decline.

JITCO, the International Human Resources Development Organization for Technical Intern Training, said the rate was calculated from the latest resident totals released by Japan’s Immigration Services Agency and measured against the sector’s projected intake ceiling through March 2029. JITCO also said the temporary suspension of certificates of eligibility for new entrants in the restaurant industry remains in place.

That distinction matters for hospitality employers. The 98.2% figure does not describe overall employment in Japanese restaurants, nor does it mean 98.2% of all restaurant jobs are held by foreign workers. It refers only to how much of the government’s planned cap for foreign workers in the food service field has been used under one visa pathway, the Specified Skilled Worker Type 1 system.

JITCO’s November 9 notice said the August update was based on the latest official data and reflected the share of the intake forecast already filled by the end of that month. In the same notice, JITCO said the combined utilization rate across all 19 sectors covered by the program rose to 54.4% from 53.6% at the end of July.

The latest reading for food service marked a modest retreat from the level JITCO reported on October 7, when the sector reached 98.6% using resident data through the end of July. Before that, JITCO said on September 7 that the food service sector had reached 98.1% based on data through the end of June. The figures show that restaurant hiring under the program has stayed near its ceiling for months, with only minor movement.

JITCO also provided broader context for labor demand across the program. In the November 9 update, it said the food and beverage manufacturing sector had exceeded 77% of its projected intake, while construction stood at 69.1% and nursing care at 65.5%. Those figures indicate that food service is not the only sector under pressure, but it remains the field closest to its cap among the categories highlighted by JITCO.

The current restrictions on new entries into food service stem from earlier growth in the number of foreign workers already in the system. In a March 31 notice, JITCO said the number of Specified Skilled Worker Type 1 residents in the food service field had reached about 46,000 as of the end of February, based on preliminary data. At that point, JITCO said the sector was expected to exceed its projected intake ceiling of 50,000 around May, prompting a policy decision to temporarily suspend the issuance of certificates of eligibility from April 13.

For restaurant operators, the update suggests that this hiring route remains tightly constrained even though the sector’s utilization rate eased by 0.4 percentage points from July to August. Employers already relying on foreign staff under the program can still see that the food service field is operating close to the government’s ceiling, while businesses seeking to bring in additional workers from abroad face the continued effect of the suspension.

JITCO’s notice did not announce an end date for the temporary halt. It presented the figures as a reference point for businesses planning their recruitment and workforce strategy. Because the numbers are tied to resident counts already recorded and to the government’s intake estimate through March 2029, the data offer a measure of remaining room within the program rather than a direct snapshot of all vacancies in the restaurant market.

The update also shows how narrow that remaining room is. At 98.2%, the food service sector is only 1.8 percentage points below the program’s projected ceiling. Even with the slight dip from July, the sector remains one of the most constrained parts of Japan’s foreign worker intake system, a sign that restaurants continue to depend heavily on a channel that is now largely filled.