COUNTRY GUIDE



ASIA

Japan.

Japan's Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (Act No. 7 of 1998) gives legal personality to citizen organizations doing volunteer-style public-interest work and sets up an approval system for those that are broadly supported by citizens. The Basic Act on Disaster Management tells the State and local governments to cooperate with volunteers, and the Cabinet Office honors system includes medals for people who risked their lives to save others and for those who volunteered to help society.

DUTY TO HELP A STRANGER
Limited

PROTECTION FOR HELPERS
Limited

GIVING AND SERVICE
4 programs and laws

Is there a legal duty to help a stranger?

LIMITED

The English Penal Code (Article 218) punishes a person who is responsible for the care of an elderly person, a child, or a person with a disability or illness and who abandons them or fails to provide necessary care. That duty attaches to people responsible for care; this guide found no general duty to rescue an unrelated stranger in the sources reviewed, which is not a finding that none exists elsewhere in Japanese law.

Penal Code (Act No. 45 of 1907) - English (Japanese Law Translation database, Ministry of Justice (Japan))

Are people who help protected?

LIMITED

No dedicated Good Samaritan statute was found. Civil Code Article 698 (read in the official Japanese text) says a person who manages another's affairs to avert imminent harm to that person's body, reputation or property is liable for resulting damage only if acting in bad faith or with gross negligence.

Civil Code (Act No. 89 of 1896), Japanese text, e-Gov law data (Article 698) (e-Gov, Digital Agency (Japan))

How the government promotes giving and service

Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities (Act No. 7 of 1998)

Article 1 states the purpose of granting legal personality to organizations doing specified non-profit activities, promoting their sound development as free social contribution activities such as volunteer activities.

JAPANESE LAW TRANSLATION DATABASE, MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (JAPAN)

Approved corporations under the same Act (Articles 44 and 45)

A specified non-profit corporation with appropriate operations that contributes to public interest may obtain approval from the competent authority, and one criterion concerns being broadly supported by citizens, assessed in part by the share of revenue from contributions.

JAPANESE LAW TRANSLATION DATABASE, MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (JAPAN)

Basic Act on Disaster Management, Article 5-3

In view of the importance of disaster management activities by volunteers, the State and local governments must respect their independence and endeavor to cooperate with them.

JAPANESE LAW TRANSLATION DATABASE, MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (JAPAN)

Honors system: Medals of Honor (Cabinet Office)
The Cabinet Office describes a Medal with Red Ribbon for individuals who have risked their own lives to save others, a Green Ribbon for morally remarkable individuals who voluntarily participated in saving society, and a Blue Ribbon for efforts in public interest and public welfare.
CABINET OFFICE, GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

Ways to give and volunteer

Japan has registered NPOs, social welfare councils and a strong tradition of disaster volunteering. After a disaster, volunteers are usually asked to register with the local volunteer center first.

Check a charity before you give

The government portal lists certified NPO corporations and their annual reports; it is mostly in Japanese.

NPO Portal Site (Cabinet Office)

Give your time

Japanese Red Cross Society
The national Red Cross society recruits volunteers for disaster relief and community services.

Japan National Council of Social Welfare
The national body behind local volunteer centers, which register disaster and community volunteers; the site is in Japanese.

Hands On Tokyo
A volunteer group that runs English-friendly volunteer activities in the Tokyo area.

Give money, blood or a donation

Japanese Red Cross blood donation
The Red Cross runs Japan's blood service and lists donation sites and rules.

Japan Organ Transplant Network
The national network explains how to record your wishes on organ donation.

Central Community Chest of Japan
The national body of the Red Feather community chest raises funds for local welfare groups.

Second Harvest Japan
Japan's first food bank collects surplus food and shares it with people in need.

Japan Platform
A framework of NGOs, business and government that coordinates emergency aid in Japan and abroad.

In an emergency or a crisis

Yorisoi Hotline: 0120-279-338
A free national hotline in Japan for anyone in distress, with foreign-language options including English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Tagalog, Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Nepali and Indonesian.

Yorisoi Hotline
A 24-hour support line for people in distress, with services in several languages.

Before you act

- Fraudulent disaster donation calls and sites appear after quakes and floods, so give through the Red Cross, Japan Platform or the local government's published account.
- Visitors on a short stay cannot be paid for work, and many volunteer centers require local residents or advance registration, so check before traveling.

This list covers only a few national and well-known channels and does not rank charities or cover every local group. Checked 2026-10-28. Listing an organization is not an endorsement, and none of them has endorsed this site. Some official sites block automatic checks, so a link may need a second try.

One thing worth knowing

The Cabinet Office honors chart separates the Red Ribbon for risking one's life to save others from the Blue Ribbon for public interest and welfare efforts, so civilian rescue and volunteer-style service are recognized under different medals.

What this does not mean

The NPO Act and Basic Act pages are official English translations whose version dates may lag current Japanese law (the NPO Act page lists its last version as Act No. 70 of 2016); only the Japanese text is authoritative. The Civil Code citation rests on the Japanese text. This guide does not claim these measures change how often people help. This is a plain-language summary of public sources, not legal advice, and it does not rank countries. No government named here has endorsed this site. Not reviewed by a lawyer. Statutes were read in public sources and may have changed. Last checked October 26, 2026.

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