

# Part 1 Feature and Topics

## Police Efforts Against Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

### About the feature

The theme of this year's police whitepaper feature is "police efforts against anonymous and fluid criminal groups."

In recent years, the public safety situation in Japan has been rapidly changing. Cyberspace has transformed into an increasingly important and public space where social and economic activities occur. In particular, social media has spread dramatically. At the same time, exchanges between people have become more and more active, both inside and outside Japan, as indicated by the fact that traffic of people has returned to pre-Covid levels. In addition to these factors, a wide range of other elements, including the country's shrinking and aging population and other demographic changes, complexly intertwine with one another to affect the public safety situation.

Under such circumstances, robberies and other serious incidents have broken out over wide stretches of the country, including the robbery-murder in the city of Komae, Tokyo in January 2023, causing grave anxiety to citizens. These crimes have been committed by criminals recruited through social media, job sites, and other channels, revealing that they communicated to the masterminds by making use of these highly anonymous means of communication. Meanwhile, the realities of communications fraud, which poses a serious threat to the public, have been gradually documented as wide-area crimes committed by criminal groups with similar characteristics. These groups differ significantly in nature from organized crime groups and other traditional criminal groups, which have a clearer structure and member composition, in the sense that their core part, which saps the proceeds of their diverse financing activities, is anonymized, and also in the sense that segmented roles are allocated to members who are loosely linked to one another via social media, job sites, and other channels, and such members are constantly being replaced to carry out a wide variety of financing activities.

Given the above situation, the police have newly designated groups that demonstrate these characteristics as "anonymous and fluid criminal groups."

One cannot take effective actions against these anonymous and fluid criminal groups simply by continuing with traditional measures. These groups are conducting a broad range of financing activities in many different fields, including communications fraud, robberies, thefts, and illegal amusement businesses. The police have been working beyond the boundaries of different sectors and prefectural forces to strategically obtain a picture of these groups and to crack down on them.

In this feature, Section 1 describes the characteristics of anonymous and fluid criminal groups and outlines their trends by introducing their typical diverse financing activities. Section 2, entitled "Measures Against Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups," is about the different types of initiatives being implemented by the Government of Japan and police to obtain a picture of these groups, to crack down on them, and to take other necessary actions. Lastly, Section 3 looks towards the future of measures against anonymous and fluid criminal groups, reflecting on the present realities of these groups and the ongoing measures being taken against them.

Organized crimes committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups pose a major threat to Japan's civil society and are a challenge requiring society-wide efforts. It would be our pleasure if this feature helps the Japanese people to deepen their understandings of police efforts against anonymous and fluid criminal groups, and assists in society-wide consideration of measures to ensure security.

# Characteristics and Trends of Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

## 1 Characteristics of Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

### (1) The rise of anonymous and fluid criminal groups

Traditionally, organized crimes in Japan have typically been committed by organized crime groups, which had reached a membership of 91,000 as of 1991, the year in which the Act for the Prevention of Wrongful Acts by Members of Organized Crime Groups was established. However, while organized crime groups have continued to pose a significant threat to society by keeping their activities low-profile and diversifying their financing methods according to the state of society, recent years have seen a consistent decline in their influence nationwide, particularly since 2005, against the backdrop of effective enforcement of the above act, strategic crackdowns, increasing effects and social awareness regarding the exclusion of organized crime groups, and other factors.

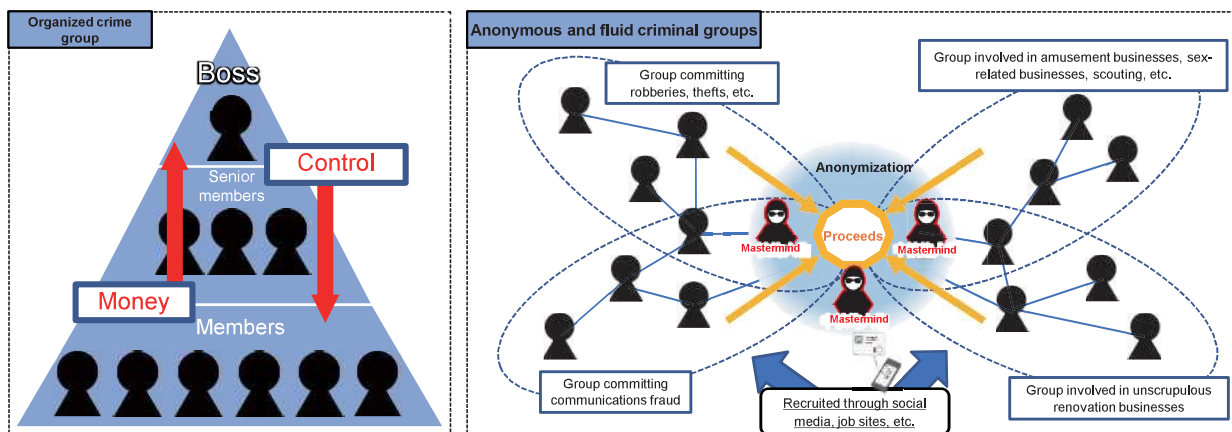
As the influence of organized crime groups has declined, there has been an increasing number of cases in which delinquents, including former members of organized crime groups and motorcycle gangs, have committed acts of force or violence and other incidents, collectively and/or habitually, in places such as bustling areas and nightlife spots, or have been involved in illegal amusement or casino businesses. Unlike organized crime groups, these groups have no clear structure; they are formed by members who are loosely linked through interpersonal relationships, such as informal seniority-based hierarchical relationships (*senpai-kohai*), friendships or acquaintanceships, while some are suspected of close relationships with organized crime groups or other antisocial forces. Police have traditionally classified these as quasi-organized crime groups and have been working to crack down on them as well.

Under such circumstances, in addition to quasi-organized crime groups, recent years have seen the rise of criminal groups with new characteristics, constituting another security threat. These new groups are what the police now call “anonymous and fluid criminal groups.” The organized crime groups that the police have long confronted are hierarchically formed by members who are connected to each other by fictitious blood-ties, maintaining a hierarchy of rank and order, under the control of a “boss” in many cases, that carry out financing activities by being backed by, or taking advantage of, the strength of their groups. By contrast, a characteristic of anonymous and fluid criminal groups is that it is more difficult to identify their organizations and members because their core part, which saps the proceeds acquired from their criminal activities, is anonymized, and segmented roles are allocated to members who are loosely linked to one another via social media, job sites, or other channels while the members are constantly replaced to carry out a wide variety of financing activities—for example, by employing new lowest-level members each time as “single-use” agents to get them to commit crimes.

In this way, anonymous and fluid criminal groups take advantage of their anonymity and fluidity and obtain funds through their involvement in many different types of criminal activities, such as communications fraud, robberies, and thefts. With traditional methods, it is difficult to identify their organizational structures, internal controls, and flows of funds and to take effective measures accordingly. This is why the police have undertaken a radical overhaul of traditional policing measures against organized crime, which have long been the focus in the fight against organized crime groups, and have been working to strategically obtain a picture of these groups and to crack down on them.

Some anonymous and fluid criminal groups are suspected of transferring part of their funds to organized crime groups, with members of such organized crime groups as their leaders or members, or committing crimes in conspiracy with organized crime group members. This suggests that organized crime groups and anonymous and fluid criminal groups are related in some way and that there are individuals who act as nodes between the two.

Chart F-1 Characteristics of organized crime groups and anonymous and fluid criminal groups



## (2) Characteristics of anonymous and fluid criminal groups

### ① Anonymization of masterminds and fluidization of those who commit crimes

One characteristic observed in incidents involving anonymous and fluid criminal groups is that their core part, which saps the proceeds acquired from their criminal activities, is anonymized—for example, masterminds give instructions to those who commit crimes through highly anonymous means of communication to steer police investigations away from themselves—while those who actually commit the crimes are fluid—for example, for each crime, new people are recruited via social media to actually commit the crime, and when they are arrested, other people are recruited.

#### MEMO

### Anonymous and fluid criminal groups recruiting people to commit crimes

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups have been observed recruiting people to commit crimes through social media and other channels—for example, using phrases like “high-paying gig job” or offering an extraordinarily high pay rate without giving much information about the job. There are cases in which these groups require applicants for such jobs (to commit crimes) to send them personally identifiable information, such as the applicant’s driver’s license, face photo, and so on, in advance via a highly anonymous means of communication so that they can make use of their advantageous position of possessing the applicant’s personal information to compel the person to submit and force the person to commit crimes repeatedly if the person hesitates to commit a crime or expresses an intention of breaking away from the group. There are also cases in which applicants are not paid as specified even when they have committed crimes.

Chart F-2

Recruitment of crime perpetrators



### ② Diverse financing activities and flow of the resulting proceeds

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are structured so that the core part of their organization benefits from a flow of proceeds in which the funds acquired from their criminal activities are used to finance other profit-gaining activities, such as running amusement businesses, while financing themselves mainly by committing a broad range of crimes—for example, communications fraud, organized robberies and thefts, illegal scouting, unscrupulous renovation businesses, and drug trafficking—and earning proceeds from such criminal activities.

#### CASE

Disguised delivery men, including a 21-year-old male civil engineering worker, broke into the home of an elderly woman through the front door in Komae City, Tokyo, in January 2023. They tied her wrists together with a zip band, hit and kicked her multiple times, and robbed her of a watch and other items (having a total value of around 590,000 yen). This series of violent acts caused her death.

Five criminals, including those who committed the assault, were arrested on charges of robbery resulting in death and other offenses in February of the same year. Further investigation revealed that the civil engineering worker committed the crime as a result of applying for criminal perpetrator recruitment information that was posted on social media and other channels, and that he received orders on social media from a man who called himself “Luffy,” who was detained at an immigration control facility in the Philippines, via smartphone. Four criminals, including the ringleader, had been arrested on charges of robbery resulting in death and other offenses by September of the same year.

The ringleader and other offenders had carried out robberies over wide stretches of Japan using similar methods, in addition to committing communications fraud many times within Japan while based in the Philippines. (Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department)

2 Trends in the Diverse Financing Activities of Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

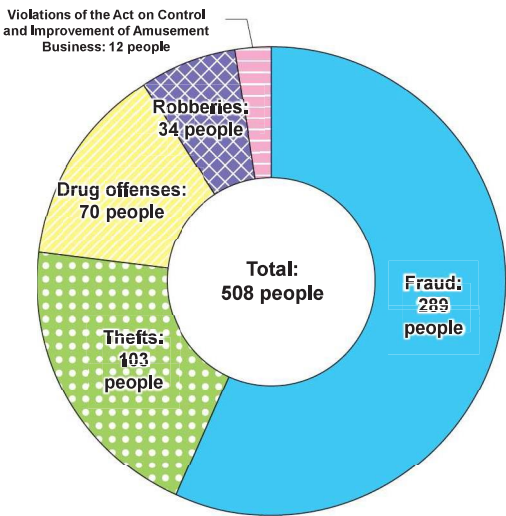
Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are observed to be obtaining funds from communications fraud and many other types of crimes. Focusing on their diverse financing activities, the police are cracking down on these groups to strike effective blows to them, while working to deprive them of the proceeds of their crimes by proactively applying the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime and other relevant laws and regulations.

Of the criminal financing activities committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups in April and May 2024 (Note 1), major criminal financing activities (Note 2) resulted in 508 arrests. By type of crime, 289 people were arrested for fraud, 34 for robberies, and 103 for thefts, indicating that fraud was the main source of financing for anonymous and fluid criminal groups.

Of the people arrested for major criminal financing activities committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups in April and May 2024, 155 became involved in the crimes as a result of applying for criminal perpetrator recruitment information posted through social media, accounting for 30.5% of all arrests.

Chart F-3

Arrests by type of major criminal financing activity committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups



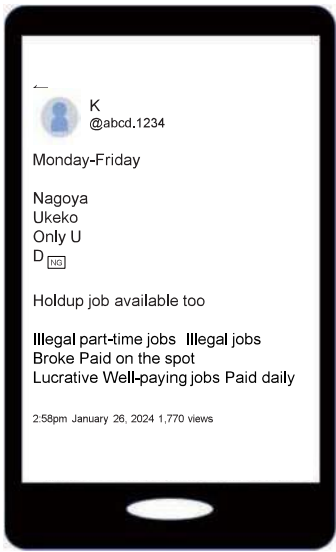
(1) Communications fraud

In 2023, 19,038 cases of communications fraud were reported, leading to total damages of approximately 45.3 billion yen. The number of reported cases increased for the third consecutive year, while the amount of damages increased for the second consecutive year. The situation remains serious with enormous damage, particularly to elderly people.

Of the 2,455 people arrested for communications fraud in 2023, 439 were members of organized crime groups (accounting for 17.9%), which suggests that communications fraud is still a major source of financing for such groups. Recent years, however, have also seen an increase in the number of communications fraud cases allegedly committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups across wide areas.

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups that commit communications fraud often post job openings for “ukeko” (who actually contact victims to receive money from them) and other roles on social media and other channels by offering to pay high compensation, and they make applicants complicit in their criminal acts.

In many cases, they use varied tactics to destroy the evidence of their crimes. For example, they often adopt highly anonymous means of communication that can automatically delete messages exchanged between the ringleader, masterminds, and those who actually commit the crimes.



Example of criminal perpetrator recruitment information

CASE

In June 2022, criminals, including a 43-year-old unemployed man, telephoned an elderly person while purporting to be a city government employee to falsely inform him that he could receive a refund, steering him to operate an ATM to transfer about 46,000 yen to a bank account managed by the unemployed man. This man belonged to a communications fraud group that employed highly anonymous means of communication for intra-group communication to commit crimes. By September 2023, 12 offenders, including this man, had been arrested on charges of computer fraud and other offenses. (Oita Prefectural Police)

Note 1: “Criminal financing activities committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups” refers to crimes that may be linked to financing for such groups. Such activities include not only communications fraud, robberies, drug trafficking, collection of protection money from restaurants and other businesses, blackmail and extortion targeting companies and administrative authorities, and fraud exploiting public benefit plans but also illegal money lending and amusement businesses that are disguised as legit economic transactions, as well as supplying workers, such as adult film scouting.

2: Fraud, robberies, thefts, drug offenses, and violations of the Act on Control and Improvement of Amusement Business



In recent years, another rising trend is communications fraud groups making their bases (e.g., where they make telephone calls from) smaller and more diverse, and relocating them more quickly. In some cases, not only the ringleader and the masterminds but also the callers and their offices are located overseas.

## CASE

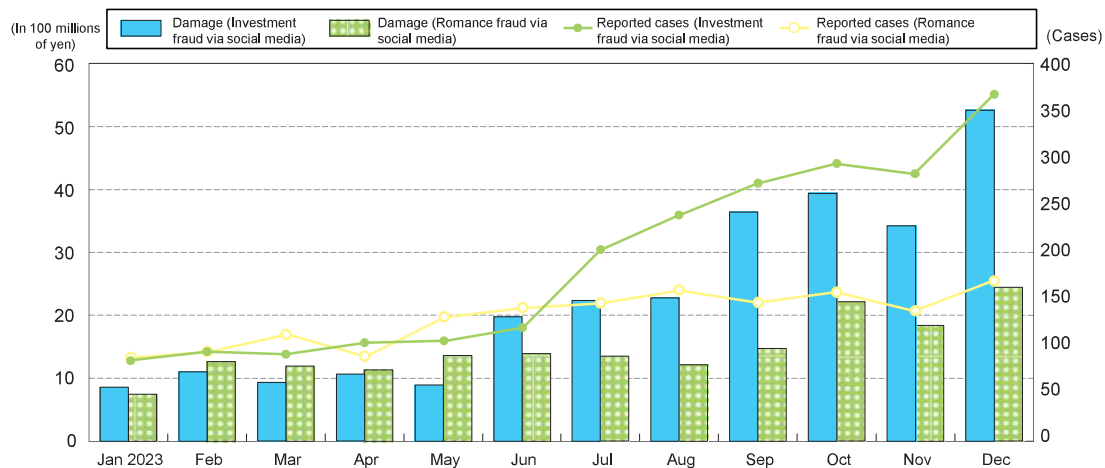
Criminals based in Cambodia, including a 38-year-old man of unknown occupation, telephoned an elderly person while purporting to be an employee of a telecommunications carrier in January 2023, falsely claiming the following: "You have an overdue payment to a paid site. You must make a payment by following our instructions." They then swindled the victim into purchasing 250,000 yen worth of electronic money. The man and the other offenders were loosely linked through highly anonymous means of communication and committed similar crimes targeting multiple elderly people. In April of the same year, 19 criminals, including the above man, were deported from Cambodia and arrested for fraud. (Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and Miyagi, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Niigata, Nagano, Shizuoka, Toyama, Gifu, Aichi, Kyoto and Fukuoka Prefectural Police)

## (2) Investment/romance fraud via social media

The latter half of 2023 saw a rapid surge non-face-to-face investment/romance fraud via social media, which has reached an alarming level as the damages caused by these types of fraud (approximately 45.5 billion yen) exceed that of communications fraud (approximately 45.3 billion yen).

Chart F-4

Numbers of reported cases of investment/romance fraud via social media and amounts of damages (by month for 2023)



		Jan 2023	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Reported numbers (cases)	Investment fraud via social media	85	94	92	104	106	120	204	241	275	296	285	369
	Romance fraud via social media	88	94	113	89	131	141	146	160	147	158	138	170
Damage (100 millions of yen)	Investment fraud via social media	8.6	11.1	9.4	10.7	9.0	19.9	22.5	22.9	36.7	34.5	53.0	
	Romance fraud via social media	7.5	12.7	12.0	11.4	13.7	14.0	13.6	12.2	14.8	22.3	18.5	24.6

In these types of fraud, perpetrators often contact victims through social media or dating apps, move them to another social media app for further communication, build trust through repeated communication, and swindle them into transferring money to the perpetrator's bank account. The damage results for 2023 reveal that men in their 50s and 60s and women in their 40s and 50s fell victim the most and that the average amount of damages per case of investment/romance fraud via social media exceeded 10 million yen that year. As the realities of damages caused by investment/romance fraud via social media and the methods employed in these crimes have yet to be sufficiently elucidated, one urgent task is to elucidate them.

Chart F-5

Age groups of victims  
(Investment fraud via social media)

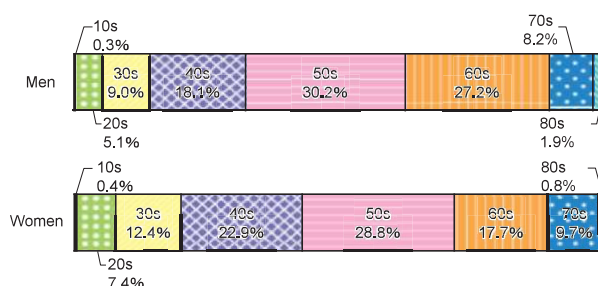
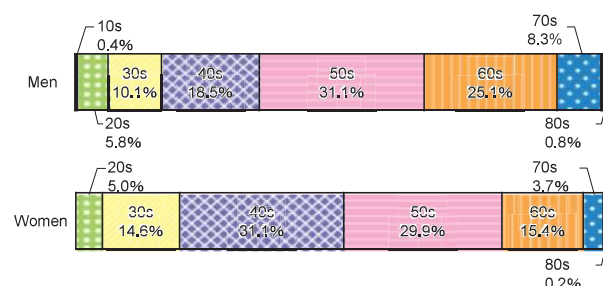


Chart F-6

Age groups of victims  
(Romance fraud via social media)



This is the backdrop against which the Comprehensive Measures to Protect People from Frauds <sup>(Note 1)</sup> were adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Measures against Crime in June 2024 to promote initiatives in line with the above measures to protect the Japanese people from these types of crime, including not only investment/romance fraud via social media but also communications fraud and phishing scams, through cooperation among related government agencies, business operators, and other involved parties.

Investment/romance fraud via social media is suspected to involve anonymous and fluid criminal groups. Keeping an eye on the possibility that these groups are committing these types of crimes to finance themselves, the police have decided to establish a cross-sectoral system to powerfully implement comprehensive measures that integrate investigation and deterrence functions, as well as measures against communications fraud and anonymous and fluid criminal groups, to prevent investment/romance fraud via social media from becoming a new “security vacuum” <sup>(Note 2)</sup>.

### (3) Robberies, thefts, and similar crimes <sup>(Note 3)</sup>

There are also cases in which the perpetrators who actually commit robberies, thefts, and similar crimes are recruited through social media, job sites, or other channels using phrases like “well-paying job” or “paid on the spot.” Between September 2021 and March 2024, 78 such robberies, thefts, and other incidents allegedly committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups occurred in 22 prefectures. Of these crimes, some were violent, including cases in which the victims were tied up and assaulted.

#### CASE

Criminals, including a 20-year-old steeplejack, broke into a victim's home in February 2023, bound the victim's legs with tape, threatened him by asking where his gold was, and robbed him of about 80,000 yen worth of cash and other items. An investigation revealed that the criminals were recruited through social media, played segmented roles (e.g., robber or drivers) under the control of masterminds, and used highly anonymous means of communication to contact each other to commit crimes. Their masterminds included those involved with an organized crime group. By August of the same year, nine suspects, including the man, had been arrested on charges of attempted robbery and murder as well as other offenses. (Fukushima Prefectural Police)

#### CASE

Criminals, including a 19-year-old restaurant employee, broke into a watch shop in May 2023, threatened a clerk by saying, “Stretch out on the floor or we will kill you,” while pointing a knife-like object at him, smashed showcases, and robbed the shop of watches and other items (worth approximately 308.56 million yen in total retail value). An investigation revealed that the 33-year-old man who arranged the vehicle used in the crime had been recruited by applying for criminal perpetrator recruitment information posted on social media, suggesting that there was an organization behind these criminals that ordered them to carry out the crime. By February 2024, seven suspects, including the above men, had been arrested on charges of robbery and other offenses. (Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department)

#### MEMO

### Organized thefts and trafficking of stolen goods

In recent years, organized crimes of metal thefts, car thefts and shoplifting have become growing security challenges. These crimes are often committed by groups of foreign nationals and other criminals, and the stolen goods are illegally exported overseas. For example, large amounts of copper cables were stolen from solar facilities by groups of foreign nationals, the members of which were frequently replaced, and the stolen goods were sold to dealers. Such thefts and other crimes are carried out in an organized and systematic manner, and these criminal activities provide sources of income for undocumented foreign residents in Japan. At the same time, it has also been found that in some cases, ringleaders based overseas use social media to order the perpetrators to steal specific goods and to send massive amounts of stolen goods to designated locations.

Taking the possibility of involvement of anonymous and fluid criminal groups into consideration, the police are putting efforts into elucidating the actual situation; within the National Police Agency, a working group has been established that holds cross-sectoral discussions to take effective measures against such organized thefts and trafficking of stolen goods.

#### CASE

Criminals, including a 26-year-old Cambodian man, stole about 2,800 meters of copper cables from two solar facilities (with a total market value of approximately 12 million yen at the time) in June and July 2023. An investigation revealed that the group was formed by members who came to know each other through a foreign national community, and the group committed multiple crimes, with members being replaced repeatedly. By December of the same year, seven suspects, including the man, had been arrested for theft (Gunma Prefectural Police).



Stolen copper cables and the tools used

Note 1: See page 21.

2: For information about the operations of an organization that prevents a “security vacuum” from arising, see page 221 (Chapter 7).

3: Robberies, thefts, home-invasions, burglaries, etc.

#### (4) Diverse financing activities in bustling areas and nightlife spots

Activities in bustling areas and nightlife spots, such as direct and indirect involvement in the management, scouting, and other operations of amusement businesses, sex-related businesses, gambling businesses, and other such businesses, are thought to be major sources of financing for anonymous and fluid criminal groups. These groups are now strengthening their resistance to the police while covering up what they are actually doing and how their funds flow—for example, by making use of highly anonymous means of communication.

##### CASE

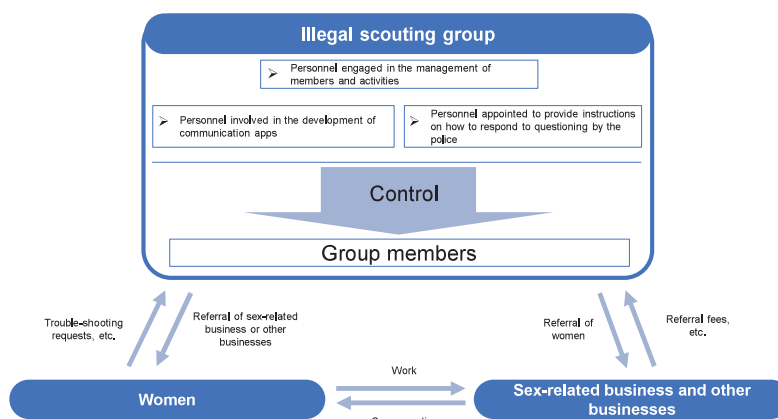
By February 2024, 21 suspects, including a 32-year-old man, who had confined a male member of their group to an apartment and punched and kicked him on the grounds of violating the group's rules, were arrested for confinement, indecency through compulsion causing injury, and other offenses. A further investigation into the group revealed that they committed illegal scouting in an organized manner.

This group, which has over 1,000 members, was widely active in bustling areas and nightlife spots not only in the Tokyo metropolitan area but also in Miyagi, Osaka, Kumamoto, and other prefectures.

Their main source of financing was referral fees from sex-related businesses and other businesses that they were paid according to the sales achieved by women whom they had referred to the businesses. This group was managing their organization as a disguised company, in which personnel engaged in the management of members and activities were working in the “general affairs division” and “contract division,” while personnel involved in the development of apps used for intra-group communication were in the “app division.” They also had organized countermeasures against the police in place—for example by appointing specific personnel to provide instructions on how to respond to questioning by the police and other matters. (Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department)

Chart F-7

Relationship between the illegal scouting group, sex-related business and other businesses, and women



Recent years have seen another type of issue come to the fore, namely male employees of “host clubs” and similar establishments demanding that their female guests pay hefty bills for the employees entertaining them and then forcing them to work as prostitutes or to work for sex-related businesses to pay such bills. Some of these host clubs and similar establishments operate without a business license issued in accordance with the Act on Control and Improvement of Amusement Business or engage in illegal activities even when they are licensed, such as violations of rules concerning custom solicitation, business hours, indication of charges, and so forth. There are also concerns about the possibility that organized crime groups and anonymous and fluid criminal groups are unfairly profiting in the background.

While keeping an eye on the possible involvement of such criminal organizations, the police are implementing strict crackdowns on unscrupulous host clubs and similar establishments that are committing illegal acts.

#### (5) Other financing activities

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups finance themselves through a wide range of activities, including not only communications fraud, robberies, and thefts but many other criminal deeds.

##### ① Fraud committed by unscrupulous renovation businesses, etc.

Criminal acts by unscrupulous renovation businesses have been reported. For example, criminals visited the homes of elderly residents and claimed to be sales representatives offering services such as installation work and plumbing or home renovation services, intentionally damaged their houses that were intact, and then charged hefty fees to repair the damage. As these malicious acts have been repeated on a continuing basis and occur in an organized manner, presumably providing a source of financing for anonymous and fluid criminal groups, the police have been working to elucidate the actual situation and implement crackdowns.

**CASE**

Seven suspects, including a 28-year-old roof-tile repairman, were arrested on charges of fraud and violation of the Specified Commercial Transactions Act (insufficient delivery of documents, etc.) in September 2023 for visiting the home of an elderly resident in April 2023 to conclude a roof-tile repair work contract, carrying out work that had no effect (fixing a leak in the roof/preventing leaking), and swindling the elderly resident out of approximately 640,000 yen in cash.

Further investigation revealed that the suspects, including the man, were operating as a group engaged in door-to-door sale of roof-tile repair services, and the various members played different segmented roles under the instructions of their mastermind. For example, the first member visited the victim's house by pretending to inform the victim about repair work that the group was doing in the neighborhood. The second member climbed up on the house's roof to inspect the roof tiles and advised the victim to sign a repair work contract. The third member came back to conclude the contract on a later day. The fourth member did the work that actually had no effect against roof leaks. These members operated in Shizuoka, Kanagawa, Yamanashi, and other prefectures while contacting each other through highly anonymous means of communication. (Shizuoka Prefectural Police)

**② Online casinos**

It has been pointed out that the number of Japanese people accessing overseas online casino sites has increased in recent years, suggesting that a growing number of Japanese gamblers have been accessing online casino sites from PCs in their homes, illegal gambling establishments, and elsewhere. Because in some cases online-casino-related gambling crimes involve organized crime groups or anonymous and fluid criminal groups, who sometimes actually manage, and other times back up, these criminal businesses, the police have been conducting intensive investigations to elucidate the actual situation while working to impose additional punishments on gambling operators and other involved offenders and deprive them of criminal proceeds by applying the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime.

**CASE**

A 40-year-old unemployed man ran an illegal gambling establishment in an apartment room where gambling customers used the provided PCs to gamble at online casinos. The man and his fellow criminals covered up their activities by, for example, relocating the gambling establishment from one apartment to another, and they were suspected of being backed up by an organized crime group because organized crime group members were observed to frequent the establishment. By February 2024, 11 suspects, including the above man, had been arrested for gambling (habitual gambling). (Kagoshima Prefectural Police)

**③ Phishing**

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of illegal transfers of funds through online banking allegedly resulting from phishing <sup>(Note 1)</sup>. Some of these cases have been reported to involve anonymous and fluid criminal groups. Police have been conducting intensive investigations to elucidate the actual situation while working in collaboration with related organizations and groups to promote measures to protect people from such crimes <sup>(Note 2)</sup>.

**CASE**

Criminals including a 49-year-old former organized crime group member carried out illegal transfers of funds from September through November 2019 in conspiracy with a Chinese man suspected of illegal acquisition of bank account and other information from online banking users via phishing, got "withdrawers" to withdraw cash on their behalf, and stole a total of five million yen. The former organized crime group member and his fellow criminals repeatedly committed similar crimes while contacting each other through highly anonymous means of communication, and the total financial damages amounted to approximately 93 million yen. Between January 2021 and January 2024, 31 suspects, including the above man, who was the ringleader, and the Chinese man, were arrested for violation of the Act on Prohibition of Unauthorized Computer Access, computer fraud, and other offenses. (Okinawa, Ibaraki, Saitama, Kanagawa, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Hyogo, Fukuoka and Miyazaki Prefectural Police)

**④ Other types of crime**

As cases have also been reported in which anonymous and fluid criminal groups engaged in trafficking of cannabis and other illegal drugs, black-market lending-related criminal acts and other financing activities, the police have been working to elucidate the actual situation and implement strict crackdowns.

**CASE**

In the course of investigating an injury case, a group of delinquents, including minors, was identified. Further investigation into the group revealed that they trafficked in cannabis procured through social media that they cultured themselves. They covered up their activities by using highly anonymous means of communication to communicate among members for trafficking purposes. By January 2024, 10 members of the group, including a 33-year-old man, had been arrested for violation of the Cannabis Control Act (for-profit cultivation). (Ehime Prefectural Police)

Note 1: A form of scam in which the attacker makes an email or SMS appear to be from a trustworthy source, such as a company or organization that actually exists or a government agency, in order to instruct the recipient to follow a link to a fraudulent website purporting to be from said company or other organization (phishing site), and deceives the person into revealing sensitive information, such as account information or credit card details, on the website.

2: For information about countermeasures against phishing, see page 116 (Chapter 3).



## CASE

Offenders, including a 44-year-old female restaurant owner, loaned money to 4 customers who applied for loans at interest rates about 6 to 31 times higher than the legal interest rate from November 2019 through June 2020, receiving approximately 400,000 yen in interest and principal. Further investigation revealed that the woman and fellow criminals belonged to a wide-area black-market lending group, which invited people to obtain black-market loans through social media and other channels, and they repeatedly carried out such criminal activities while hiring users of their loan service who were struggling to pay off their loans to work for them—for example, to attract new users and to collect debts. By October 2023, 14 members of the group had been arrested for violation of the Act Regulating the Receipt of Contributions, the Receipt of Deposits, and Interest Rates (high interest rates) and other offenses, and a protective order in anticipation of confiscation was issued for approximately 8 million yen of cash possessed by group members, prior to their indictment, in accordance with the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime. (Shimane and Fukuoka Prefectural Police)

## MEMO



## Anonymous and fluid criminal groups according to those on the front lines

The National Police Agency must accurately reflect the realities observed daily by those working on the front lines of the fight against organized crime, so that effective measures can be taken to combat anonymous and fluid criminal groups, which have been positioned as a security threat. To this end, the National Police Agency repeatedly exchanges opinions with “the information officers” (Note 1), who play leadership roles in the collection and analysis of information of the prefectural police headquarters, and other senior investigation officers. The following introduces some such front-line voices collected from the information officers and those responsible for investigating communications fraud.

### ① The influence of anonymous and fluid criminal groups

The majority of those on the front lines consider anonymous and fluid criminal groups to be “growing in their overall influence” or “growing in their influence in some areas.” This trend is observed not only in major cities but across Japan.

### ② Crackdowns on anonymous and fluid criminal groups

In cracking down on anonymous and fluid criminal groups, social media and other highly anonymous means of communication create obstacles to investigations. The importance of overcoming such obstacles is widely recognized by senior investigation officers across various parts of Japan. Some have called for initiatives such as “strengthening cooperative relationships with telecommunications carriers, crypto-asset exchange service providers, and other related business operators” and “enhancing mobile phone analysis technology,” while others demand the introduction of new investigation methods, including “undercover operations” (Note 2). In addition to these, the following passionate opinions have been shared by those working on the front lines.

#### [Voices from the front lines]

- In cracking down on anonymous and fluid criminal groups, it is important to promote lean, efficient investigations by integrating and sharing information from different sectors, in addition to intensive bottom-up investigations carried out by individual sectors.
- My understanding is that making cooperative efforts inside each prefectural police force is not enough to effectively deal with communications fraud and other types of crime committed on a national scale. It is only when the entire police force of Japan makes concerted efforts that truly efficient investigations can be carried out to devastate anonymous and fluid criminal groups.
- As anonymous and fluid criminal groups have been using all possible means to anonymize and cover up their activities, the police must also be creative in carrying out powerful measures against them, rather than sticking to more traditional methods, such as “Damasaretahuri Operation” in which a victim pretended to be taken in to lure a perpetrator into picking up money under surveillance of investigators, and protecting cooperators.
- Anonymous and fluid criminal groups have been introducing new technologies to conduct criminal financing activities. To respond precisely to this trend, it is necessary to improve our social media and mobile phone analysis technologies; to further enhance measures related to criminal tools, such as mobile phones, bank accounts, and electronic money; and to implement other measures.

Reflecting these voices from the front lines, the entire police force of Japan stands ready to work as one to powerfully implement diverse measures against anonymous and fluid criminal groups.

Note 1: The organized crime departments of prefectural police forces have an “information management system,” which appoints the senior information officers and other relevant personnel, to implement even more strategic measures against organized crime by enabling centralized storage and analysis of organized-crime-related information possessed by individual related sectors and promoting information sharing, etc. among them.

Note 2: An investigation method by which investigators collect information and evidence by, for example, working secretly under false identities to contact targets.

# Measures Against Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

1

## Strengthening of Systems for Elucidating the Actual Situation and Implementing Crackdowns

### (1) Strengthening of systems for strategically cracking down on anonymous and fluid criminal groups

Given the fact that anonymous and fluid criminal groups take advantage of their anonymity and fluidity to obtain funds by getting involved in many different types of criminal activities (such as communications fraud, robberies, and thefts), the police have established new systems to enable them to fully demonstrate their collective strength according to the realities of crimes and activities of their targets, going beyond the boundaries of different sectors and crime categories, so that they can deeply investigate the earnings structures of criminal groups, and are thus promoting intensive crackdowns of these groups. In particular, in April 2024 the police established new full-time systems targeting anonymous and fluid criminal groups, which are not segmented by sector, to allow police forces across Japan to work to elucidate the actual situations so as to obtain a picture of the activities of these groups,

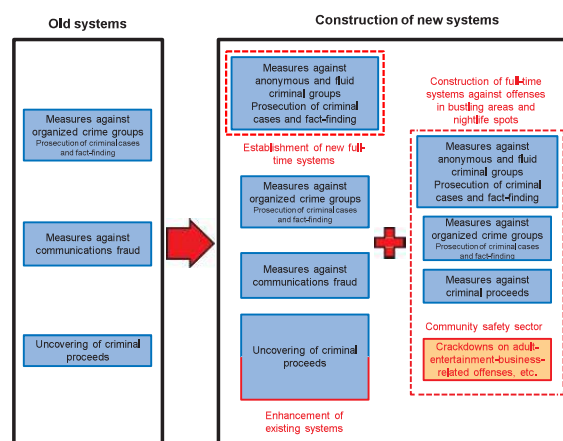
such as how they commit crimes and finance themselves, and to prosecute criminal cases to crack down on core figures and other related parties, in addition to existing crackdown systems targeting organized crime groups and communications fraud.

Meanwhile, the police have extended their existing systems for uncovering criminal proceeds with the aim of ensuring that criminals are deprived of advantages obtained from committing crimes by promoting investigations into the financing activities, money laundering activities, and so forth of anonymous and fluid criminal groups so as to undermine such groups.

Furthermore, prefectural police departments that have major bustling areas and nightlife spots under their jurisdictions have established special full-time systems that include the organized crime sector, community safety sector, and other sectors to take cross-sectoral measures in order to obtain a picture of anonymous and fluid criminal groups engaged in a wide variety of financing activities based in bustling areas and nightlife spots, including amusement businesses, and to crack down on them.

Chart F-8

Strengthening systems for cracking down on anonymous and fluid criminal groups



### MEMO

#### The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Special Assignment Team for Elucidating the Actual Situation of and Cracking Down on Criminal Groups, Etc.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department launched the Special Assignment Team for Elucidating the Actual Situation of and Cracking Down on Criminal Groups, Etc. in December 2022. The purpose of the team, which is headed by the Deputy Superintendent General, is to collect and analyze information concerning criminal groups and other such groups as well as to work to elucidate the actual situation and implement crackdowns by setting up cross-sectoral task forces to handle cases.

For example, given the fact that organized crime groups and anonymous and fluid criminal groups have been observed to be involved in amusement, gambling, and other businesses, including scouting, solicitation, and other related activities, mainly in bustling areas and nightlife spots, and that they benefit from the flow of criminal proceeds by allocating proceeds from the above activities and other funds acquired from crimes to finance their new amusement businesses and other businesses, the Amusement Business & Scouting Task Force is working to obtain a picture of these groups and to crack down on them through collaboration with the Organized Crime Division, the Organized Crime Control Division, the International Crime Division, the Drugs and Firearms Division, the Organized Crime Control Special Investigation Unit, the Safety Division, and the Community Safety Special Investigation Unit.

In June 2023, suspects, including a 40-year-old sex-related business owner who had hired Chinese women applying to work for the owner's company through an online site and had these women working as prostitutes for Chinese customers in the Ikebukuro district, were arrested by the Amusement Business & Scouting Task Force on charges of violating the Act on Control and Improvement of Amusement Business and other offenses.

## MEMO

## Provision of the Anonymous Reporting Hotline

Although there are already various means of reporting information about criminal organizations to the police, such as Dial 110 and police consultation telephone number, these are for direct reporting to the police, which can discourage people from reporting for fear of becoming identified and ending up involved in criminal procedures through questioning by investigators or in other forms. This is particularly true for reporting about organized crime; people often fear possible retribution or harassment from criminal organizations so much that they hesitate to report such matters to the police.

Taking this into consideration, the police have introduced an anonymous reporting service (Anonymous Reporting Hotline) for receiving anonymous calls which pays an information fee to callers who provide effective information. This system helps the police to obtain a picture of anonymous and fluid criminal groups and other types of criminal organizations and to more effectively crack down on them.



Public relations material about the Anonymous Reporting Hotline

## (2) Strengthening of wide-area cooperation in investigations

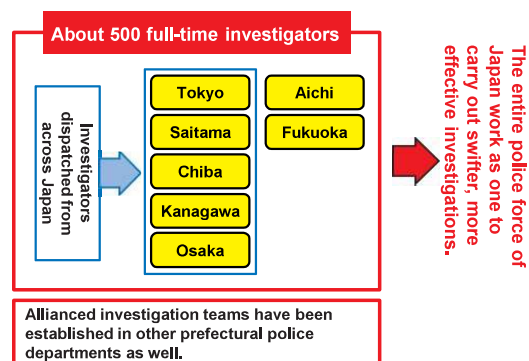
While communications fraud cases committed by organized crime groups and anonymous and fluid criminal groups occur in different parts of Japan, the vast majority of suspects and their criminal bases are located in the Tokyo metropolitan area and other major urban areas. This means that investigations must be carried out over wide areas, and the police have sought more efficient methods for such investigations.

Taking this background into account, a Telecom scam Allied Investigation Team (TAIT<sup>(Note)</sup>) was set up in each prefectural police department in April 2024, enabling each team to implement necessary investigations within their own jurisdiction at the request of other prefectural police departments, thus allowing the entire police force of Japan to work as one to carry out more efficient investigations. In particular, seven police departments where investigation needs are expected to converge, namely the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and the Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Aichi, Osaka and Fukuoka Prefectural Police, have their own respective full-time investigation systems in place, to which a total of about 500 investigators are allocated, including those dispatched from across Japan.

Moreover, these TAITs are utilized for swift and effective investigations into investment/romance fraud via social media cases as they share some characteristics with communications fraud in terms of investigation methods and other aspects.

Chart F-9

Establishment of the Telecom Scam Allied Investigation Team (TAIT)



The Director-General of the Criminal Affairs Bureau giving instructions to prefectural police departments about TAIT management policies at a national meeting of directors of divisions in charge of communications fraud

Note: The Telecom scam Allied Investigation Team is popularly known as "TAIT."



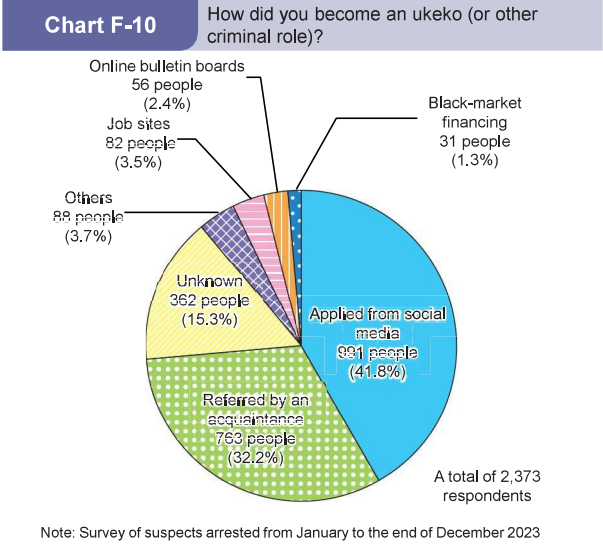
2

Measures to Prevent People from Joining Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups

(1) Measures against recruitment to commit crimes by anonymous and fluid criminal groups

In recent years, job openings have been posted on social media and other online platforms to recruit people to commit crimes. Such criminal job information often avoids clearly stating that the objective is to recruit people to commit crimes—for example, by using phrases such as “high-paying gig job” or offering an extraordinarily high pay rate without giving much information about the job. In fact, 41.8% of suspects who were arrested for their involvement in communications fraud as “ukeko” or other roles in 2023 told the police that they had started their criminal roles (e.g., as “ukeko”) as the result of “applying for a job on social media.” Such criminal perpetrator recruitment information posted to recruit people to commit crimes provides opportunities for people, particularly the youth, to casually become involved in communications fraud and other types of crime.

The police are working in cooperation with related organizations, groups, and other parties to promote a wide range of measures to prevent people from becoming perpetrators in this way.



① Operation of the Internet Hotline Center

The National Police Agency operates the Internet Hotline Center (IHC) <sup>(Note 1)</sup>, which accepts reports about illegal information and other topics from general Internet users and other parties, reports such matters to the police when necessary, requests that site administrators remove inappropriate information, and so forth. Given the current situation in which the Internet has become flooded with criminal perpetrator recruitment information, “criminal perpetrator recruitment information” was added in September 2023 as a type of “information closely related to serious crime” <sup>(Note 2)</sup>, which refers to a type of crime handled by the IHC, in order to work to eliminate such information.

The police also make use of reply functions on social media to promote measures such as issuing personal warnings to those who have posted criminal perpetrator recruitment information.

For more information on how the IHC is operated, please see Charts F-11 and F-12 <sup>(Note 3)</sup>.



Public relations material about the IHC

Chart F-11

Cases analyzed by the IHC by year <sup>(Note)</sup>

Category \ Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number (case count)	29,285	67,518	44,555	28,585	44,685
Illegal information	26,656	63,189	41,944	25,895	33,200
Suicidogenic information, etc.	2,629	4,329	2,611	2,690	6,609
Information closely related to serious crimes	—	—	—	—	4,876
Criminal perpetrator recruitment information	—	—	—	—	4,411
Others	—	—	—	—	465

Note: Information that was not analyzed is excluded.

Chart F-12

Illegal information cases reported to the police and removed by year <sup>(Note)</sup>

Category \ Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Reported to the police (case count)	2,269	3,099	3,795	3,490	2,818
Removed (case count)	1,482	1,787	1,846	2,026	1,645

Note: The number of cases in which the information was confirmed to be removed within five business days after the request for information removal was made to the provider or other responsible party

Note 1: See page 117 (Chapter 3).

2: Information closely related to serious crime that is highly likely to cause damage to the life, body, etc. of individuals. For example, information that directly and clearly encourages the transfer of a gun, information recognized as directly and clearly contributing to the manufacture of explosives or firearms, or information that directly and clearly indicates a murder contract.

3: The values are sourced from data published by IHC.



## ② Elimination of illegal and harmful labor recruitment activities from cyberspace

Criminal perpetrator recruitment information has also been posted on job sites and other channels. To eliminate such information, the police have been supporting the efforts of Prefectural Labour Bureaus and other related parties to help approach media for job seekers and other business organizations as well as their owners.

At the same time, the police are also implementing crackdowns on this type of crime, given the fact that distribution of such information falls under the definition of “labor recruitment” with “an intention of having workers do work harmful to public health or morals” as stipulated in the Employment Security Act.

### CASE

A 26-year-old unemployed woman posted recruitment information on social media, stating “ukeko wanted” and “monetary compensation of 100,000 to 300,000 yen,” with the aim of recruiting members to work for her communications fraud group, mainly as “ukeko,” in July 2023. In October of the same year, the woman was arrested for violating the Employment Security Act (labor recruitment for harmful jobs). (Miyagi Prefectural Police)

## (2) Education and awareness building to prevent young people from casually becoming involved in criminal activities

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups recruit people through social media and other channels to actually commit crimes on their behalf. Many cases have been reported in which young people casually applied for jobs to make a quick profit and ended up “committing one crime after another directed by criminals and received no compensation at all” or “were betrayed by the criminal group, which reported them to the police, causing them to be arrested.” In this way, these criminal groups often take advantage of young people and dispose of them as “single-use” agents.

The police have been working in collaboration with related organizations to strengthen awareness-building activities by making use of a broad variety of opportunities and public relations media to prevent young people from casually becoming involved in such criminal activities without adequately understanding the gravity of what they are getting involved in. In July 2023, a public relations document (Note) was created to show how young people could be taken advantage of by criminal groups and arrested after applying for criminal perpetrator recruitment information. Juvenile delinquency prevention classes and other programs have also been provided to increase public awareness about the realities of posting criminal perpetrator recruitment information, the risks of involvement in criminal activities, and the wrongfulness of criminal organizations.



Public relations material targeting young people

## 3

### Measures Against Tools Exploited by Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups to Commit Crimes

#### (1) Measures against saving accounts abused by anonymous and fluid criminal groups

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are reported to have abused illegally transferred savings accounts to make payments and receive money. To prevent such exploitation of savings accounts for criminal purposes, the police have been promoting measures against misuse of savings accounts—for example, by carrying out stricter crackdowns in accordance with the Act on Prevention of Transfer of Criminal Proceeds and other relevant laws and regulations—in addition to providing information about methods used to open fraudulent accounts to financial institutions and other parties as well as demanding that they ensure that their customers and other people are reminded of, and sufficiently alerted to, such risks.

Recent years have also seen cases in which savings accounts illegally transferred from foreign nationals leaving Japan to return to their home countries have been utilized by anonymous and fluid criminal groups for various kinds of financing activities, particularly communications fraud. The National Police Agency has been working in collaboration with related organizations and groups to implement intensive public relations activities to raise public awareness about and draw attention to the illegality of illicit transfers of savings accounts.



Reminder leaflet for foreign nationals

Note : <https://www.npa.go.jp/bureau/safetylife/yamibaito/yamibaitojirei.pdf>



## (2) Measures against abuse of telephone numbers by anonymous and fluid criminal groups

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are reported to have abused telephone numbers to commit diverse financing activities. For example, of the 19,038 communications fraud cases for which the police received damage reports in 2023, 77.5% of the first contacts that criminals made with victims were by telephone. The criminals are reported to have used many different types of telephone numbers, such as landline telephone numbers, specified IP telephone numbers (050 IP telephone numbers), mobile phone numbers, and international numbers. The police are promoting a wide range of measures against such abuse of telephone numbers.

### ① Measures against misuse of mobile phone numbers

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are reported to have exploited illegally acquired mobile phones to protect themselves from investigations. In fact, there have been cases in which these groups abused illegally acquired mobile phones that were subscribed to service under fictitious names or other people's names—for example, by presenting false identification to mobile voice communications carriers or by utilizing other people's identification documents to impersonate them when concluding a subscription contract.

The police provide information to mobile voice communications carriers so that they can refuse to provide services to users of illegally acquired mobile phones in accordance with the Act on Identity Confirmation, etc. Performed by Mobile Voice Communications Carriers for their Subscribers, etc. and Prevention of Wrongful Use of Mobile Voice Communications Services. At the same time, the police are carrying out other measures against criminal abuse of mobile phones—for example, arresting unscrupulous mobile phone rental service providers.

### ② Measures against misuse of landline telephone numbers

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are reported to have abused call-forwarding systems <sup>(Note)</sup> to make telephone calls from their mobile phones and other devices appear as if they were from landline telephone numbers (for example, “03-XX-XX”), to have tricked victims into calling telephone numbers that purported to be those of public offices (for example, by demanding that they do so in writing (e.g., by postcard)), and so on.

Given such circumstances, telecommunications carriers have been utilizing a mechanism to cancel abused landline telephone numbers at the request of the police since September 2019, while the police have also been taking measures such as collecting information about subscribers to cancelled telephone numbers and demanding that telecommunications carriers refuse to assign new telephone numbers to subscribers whose numbers have been cancelled multiple times within a certain period. As of the end of 2023, 12,665 telephone numbers have been cancelled at the request of the police.

Chart F-13

Types of phone numbers exploited for communications fraud by month

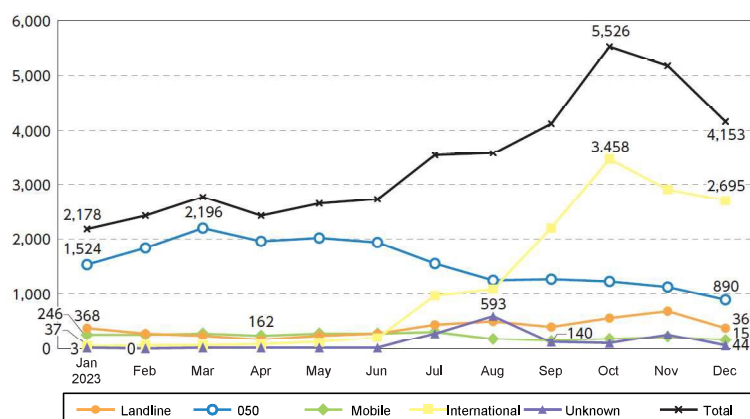


Chart F-14

How mobile voice communications carriers refuse to provide services in accordance with the relevant laws

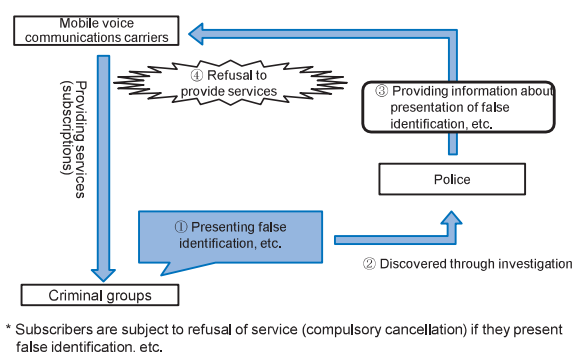
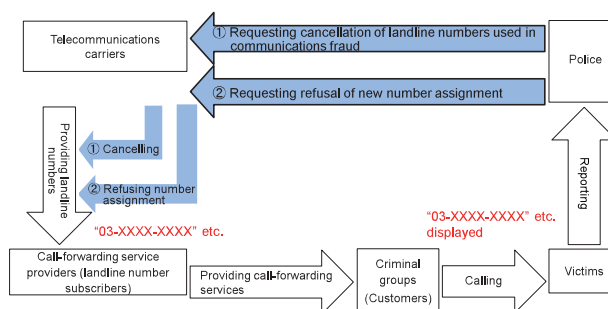


Chart F-15

How abused landline telephone numbers are cancelled



Note: Systems by which call-forwarding service providers assign landline telephone numbers provided by telecommunications carriers to customers, so that telephone calls involving the assigned telephone numbers will be automatically forwarded to the telephone numbers of the customers and the people to whom they are making the telephone calls.

### ③ Measures against misuse of specified IP telephone numbers

Recent years have seen many cases in which specified IP telephone numbers (050 IP telephone numbers) were abused in criminal activities, particularly for communications fraud, which is one of the diverse financing activities of anonymous and fluid criminal groups. In response, in November 2021, “specified IP telephone numbers” were added to the target numbers in the system by which telecommunications carriers cancel landline telephone numbers, etc. used in criminal activities. As of the end of 2023, 9,482 specified IP telephone numbers have been cancelled at the request of the police.

#### MEMO



#### Collective cancellation of “numbers in stock” owned by unscrupulous call-forwarding service providers

Some malicious call-forwarding service providers are reported to have repeatedly supplied telephone numbers to those involved in perpetrating communications fraud and other criminals.

The police and related organizations and groups have been working in cooperation to address this situation. On July 1, 2023, they introduced a system for collectively cancelling all “numbers in stock” owned by such unscrupulous call-forwarding service providers, including those that had already been provided to customers.

In 2023, collective cancellation of 3,270 numbers in total, owned by four business operators, was carried out.

#### MEMO



#### Requiring users of “050 app telephone numbers” to undergo an identity verification procedure

The Ordinance for Enforcement of the Act on Identity Confirmation, etc. Performed by Mobile Voice Communications Carriers for their Subscribers, etc. and Prevention of Wrongful Use of Mobile Voice Communications Services was partially revised to further enhance measures against misuse of specified IP telephone numbers. Consequently, in April 2024, users of “050 app telephone numbers” became required to undergo an identity verification procedure to conclude a contract for service provision in accordance with the above Act.

### (3) Measures against misuse of name lists by anonymous and fluid criminal groups

Cases have been reported in which criminal groups took possession of name lists, mainly those of elderly people, and contacted the people on the lists by telephone or other means to commit communications fraud, robberies, thefts, and other crimes. When the police obtain such name lists in the course of investigations, the police inform those on the lists by having police officers visit their homes or telephoning them through contracted call centers to alert them as well as to give them instructions and guidance regarding specific measures to take.

Moreover, the National Police Agency has been encouraging related organizations and groups to ensure even more appropriate treatment of personal information, in addition to exchanging opinions with the secretariat of the Personal Information Protection Commission regarding the realities of misuse of name lists.

#### **(4) Measures against new types of crime involving misuse of telecommunications technology by anonymous and fluid criminal groups**

##### **① Measures against misuse of crypto-assets**

Recent years have seen cases in which anonymous and fluid criminal groups have abused crypto-assets or concealed their criminal proceeds in the form of crypto-assets in their financing activities. The police have been tracking transfers of crypto-assets, which can be misused in many different criminal activities in this way, and the National Police Agency has been carrying out cross-sectoral and comprehensive analyses of the tracking results and has been sharing them with prefectural police departments. These initiatives are resulting in the identification of relationships across multiple cases, the organizations behind them, and other discoveries that might not have been made through conventional investigations. For example, there have been cases in which the same suspects turned out to have been involved in illegal transfers of funds through online banking and communications fraud. In the future, these investigations are anticipated to evolve further.

Meanwhile, there have been many cases of criminal exploitation of crypto-assets in which funds were transferred to financial institution accounts at crypto-asset exchange service providers. Given this situation, in February 2024, the police collaborated with the Financial Services Agency and demanded that the relevant organizations and other parties strengthen their countermeasures, such as by refusing to process transfers of funds when the name of the remitter differs from that of the account holder from which the funds are to be transferred when transferring funds to a financial institution account owned by a crypto-asset exchange service provider, or by monitoring for fraudulent transfers of funds to crypto-asset exchange service providers.

##### **② Measures against misuse of electronic money**

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are reported to have tricked victims into purchasing electronic money at convenience stores and to have fraudulently acquired such funds by communications fraud and other financing activities. The police and related business operators have been cooperating to take measures against such misuse of electronic money—for example, by encouraging employees of convenience stores and other parties to alert customers who are purchasing electronic money and by displaying reminders and information that can draw the attention of customers on store shelves, at checkout counters, and on terminal screens, in addition to strengthening functions for detection and cancellation of electronic money that has been swindled through monitoring.

##### **③ Measures against phishing**

Recent years have seen an increase in the amount of illegal transfers of funds through online banking that are alleged to have resulted from phishing <sup>(Note 1)</sup>. Given this situation, the police have been collaborating with related organizations and groups to display reminders on the website of the National Police Agency to protect people from phishing, in addition to demanding that financial institutions implement effective phishing countermeasures by learning from specific cases of phishing that have occurred.

In addition to the above, the National Police Agency has been working to prevent people from accessing phishing sites through efforts such as summarizing URL information on phishing sites identified by prefectural police departments and providing it to antivirus software companies and other related parties so that their antivirus software can effectively display warnings and other alerts.



#### **Measures against misuse of false online information in criminal activities**

In recent years, the increased penetration of digital services—including social media, video-streaming sites, and posting sites—has enabled everyone to communicate information, resulting in a gigantic amount of data distributed over the Internet, which anyone can access. Given such circumstances, there have been cases in which false information generated using deep fake <sup>(Note 2)</sup> technology has spread.

False information generated in this way, including such information created by anonymous and fluid criminal groups, is at risk of being misused for fraud and other criminal activities. The police are paying close attention to how new technologies can be exploited for criminal purposes.

Note 1: See page 8.

2: Technology that uses AI tools to generate fake videos or audio.



Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are involved in the management, scouting, and other operations of amusement businesses, sex-related businesses, gambling businesses, and other such businesses in bustling areas and nightlife spots, and these are major sources of financing for such groups. Given this situation, prefectural police departments that have large-scale bustling areas and nightlife spots under their jurisdictions have established special full-time systems to take cross-sectoral measures in order to obtain a picture of the anonymous and fluid criminal groups engaged in a wide variety of financing activities based in bustling areas and nightlife spots, including amusement businesses, and to crack down on them <sup>(Note)</sup>. In addition, the police are promoting the following measures targeted at bustling areas and nightlife spots.

### (1) Elimination of anonymous and fluid criminal groups from bustling areas and nightlife spots and dismantling of their criminal infrastructure

The police are instructing real-estate traders, building owners, management companies, and other related parties to take necessary measures, such as eliminating members of criminal organizations, illegal amusement businesses, and similar entities from real-estate rental contracts, while encouraging people in local shopping areas and municipalities to work to facilitate swift, appropriate occupancy of empty buildings, shops, and other facilities with the aim of preventing illegal amusement businesses and similar entities from moving into such buildings, shops, and other facilities that have become vacant as a result of crackdowns on illegal amusement businesses and similar entities.

The police are also collaborating with food industry unions and other relevant parties to help restaurants and other businesses operating in bustling areas and nightlife spots to reject unwarranted demands from anonymous and fluid criminal groups and other criminal organizations, while dealing strictly with conduct that is deemed necessary to police.

Moreover, the police are working to prevent magazines and websites specializing in amusement information, free newspapers for foreign nationals in Japan, and other media from becoming involved with criminal organizations or providing illegal intermediation, mediation, or other services for those seeking status of residence, housing, and so forth by appealing to related industries and other parties.

### (2) Prevention of scouting and other acts that disturb the peace

There have been cases in which unscrupulous scouting and other acts that disturb the peace have occurred at major stations, on bustling streets, and in other places, mainly to take advantage of the economic difficulties of women and young people in order to trap them into working for sex-related businesses, appearing in porn videos, and so on. This type of scouting leads to the sexual and labor exploitation of women and young people as well as results in illegal proceeds flowing to anonymous and fluid criminal groups and other criminal organizations.

The police apply the Act on Control and Improvement of Amusement Business, the Anti-Prostitution Act, and other relevant laws and regulations to such scrupulous scouting and other acts that disturb the peace that frequently occur in specific districts, such as solicitation for prostitution, unjust collection of money from customers of amusement businesses and other businesses, and touting. In addition, the police promote proactive guidance and crackdowns on them through arrests, administrative punishments, warnings, directions, protection by taking people into custody from the streets, and other measures.

#### CASE

In December 2023, the Chiba Prefectural Police implemented a joint patrol with Chiba City (including the Chiba City Instructors for Prevention of Touting), anti-crime organization members, and other participants in Chuo Ward, Chiba City. In this patrol, participants reminded local shops that their neighborhood was a “no-touting zone” while encouraging passersby not to follow people who were touting businesses. In this way, the police are promoting public-private joint efforts to improve the social environment and to help create safer communities.



Joint patrol

### (3) Measures against juvenile delinquency

Young people who gather in bustling areas and nightlife spots often build collective delinquent relationships with members of criminal organizations and other people. Out of concern that these juveniles are becoming involved in crimes committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups, the police are working to obtain a picture of these collective delinquent relationships—for example, by conducting investigations and research into criminal cases involving juveniles, protecting young people by taking them into custody from the streets, and exchanging information with people in local shopping areas. The police are also implementing measures to dissolve, and prevent the formation of such relationships.

## 5 Intensive International Investigations and Greater Cooperation with Foreign Authorities

In recent years, a growing trend among anonymous and fluid criminal groups is that they have become more likely to make their bases smaller and more diverse and to relocate them more quickly. In some cases, not only the ringleaders and masterminds but also the callers and their offices are based overseas. In particular, the numbers of reported cases and arrests for communications fraud committed by criminals based in overseas locations (their offices) have surged dramatically and are expected to increase further.

Upon obtaining information about such criminal groups, the National Police Agency proactively exchanges information with investigative organizations in the involved countries to bust criminal groups operating abroad. In addition, the agency promotes cooperation in international investigations through INTERPOL <sup>(Note 1)</sup> and other institutions as well as international assistance in investigations through diplomatic routes, treaties, agreements, and so forth with the aim of facilitating the extradition of suspects and delivery of evidence.

At the same time, the agency has been strengthening international cooperation to suppress criminal groups—for example, by making use of international conferences as opportunities to proactively exchange information and hold discussions with investigative organizations and other parties in Southeast Asian countries and elsewhere as to how effective preventative measures and investigative cooperation involving the detection of criminal bases, extradition of suspects, and so forth should be implemented.

Chart F-16 summarizes the suspects who were deported to and arrested in Japan in 2023 after their offices and other bases abroad were detected.



International conference with Southeast Asian countries

Chart F-16

Suspects arrested in 2023 for communications fraud committed from overseas bases

Number	Month of arrest	Country	Charged offense	Number of people arrested	Arresting police
1	Feb 2023	Philippines	Theft	4 persons	Tokyo
2	Mar 2023	Philippines	Theft	1 person	Tokyo
3	Apr 2023	Cambodia	Fraud	19 persons	Tokyo
4	May 2023	Philippines	Theft	4 persons	Tokyo
5	May 2023	Thailand	Theft and fraud	2 persons	Aichi
6	Aug 2023	Cambodia	Fraud	2 persons	Saga
7	Aug 2023	Vietnam	Theft	6 persons	Osaka
8	Sep 2023	Cambodia	Fraud	1 person	Saga
9	Nov 2023	Cambodia	Fraud	25 persons	Saitama
10	Nov 2023	Thailand	Fraud	1 person	Gifu
11	Dec 2023	Thailand	Fraud	1 person	Gifu
12	Dec 2023	Vietnam	Fraud	3 persons	Saitama
Total				69 persons	

### MEMO

### Promoting the enhancement of international collaboration to fight organized fraud

The G7 Interior and Security Ministers' Meeting <sup>(Note 2)</sup>, which took place in Mito City, Ibaraki Prefecture, from December 8 to 10, 2023, included a session entitled "Transnational Organized Crime."

After heated discussion in the session, the meeting agreed that transnational organized fraud was a challenge shared by the G7 countries that they needed to join forces to fight, leading to the adoption of the G7 Interior and Security Ministers' Communiqué in Mito, Ibaraki, which included the "G7 Declaration on Enhancing Cooperation in the Fight against Transnational Organized Fraud."

In addition, the Deputy Commissioner General of the National Police Agency attended the Global Fraud Summit held in London in March 2024, where he discussed enhancing international collaboration to fight organized fraud and other crimes with relevant organizations of the G7 and other countries, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and other international organizations. This summit adopted a communiqué committed to combatting fraud through international collaboration.



G7 Interior and Security Ministers' Meeting



Global Fraud Summit in the UK

Note 1: INTERPOL refers to the International Criminal Police Organization.

2: For information about the G7 Interior and Security Ministers' Communiqué in Mito, Ibaraki, see page 32 (Topic IV).

## 6 Measures Against Criminal Proceeds

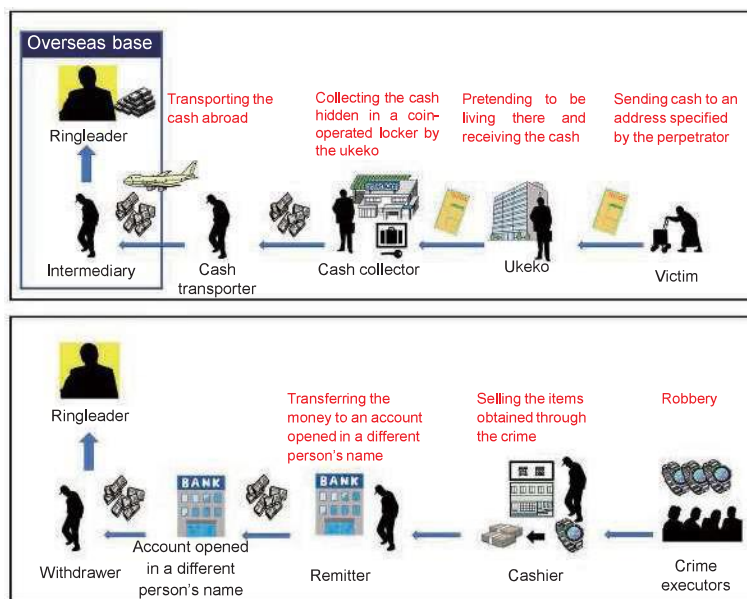
Anonymous and fluid criminal groups legitimize their criminal proceeds using artful money laundering techniques; they adopt a wide range of techniques, including delivering cash by means of coin-operated lockers; transferring money using bank accounts opened in fictitious names or other people's names; selling stolen goods and similar using other people's identification documents; making use of crypto-assets, electronic money, and so on; withdrawing and receiving money by disguising such transactions as those of a company associated with the criminal group; and routing money through overseas bank accounts, to keep investigative organizations and other parties from probing them.

Criminal proceeds normally end up in the hands of the masterminds. To deprive anonymous and fluid criminal groups of the proceeds of their crimes in order to prevent them from benefitting from the flow of money, the police are intensively tracking and analyzing criminal groups' flows of funds.

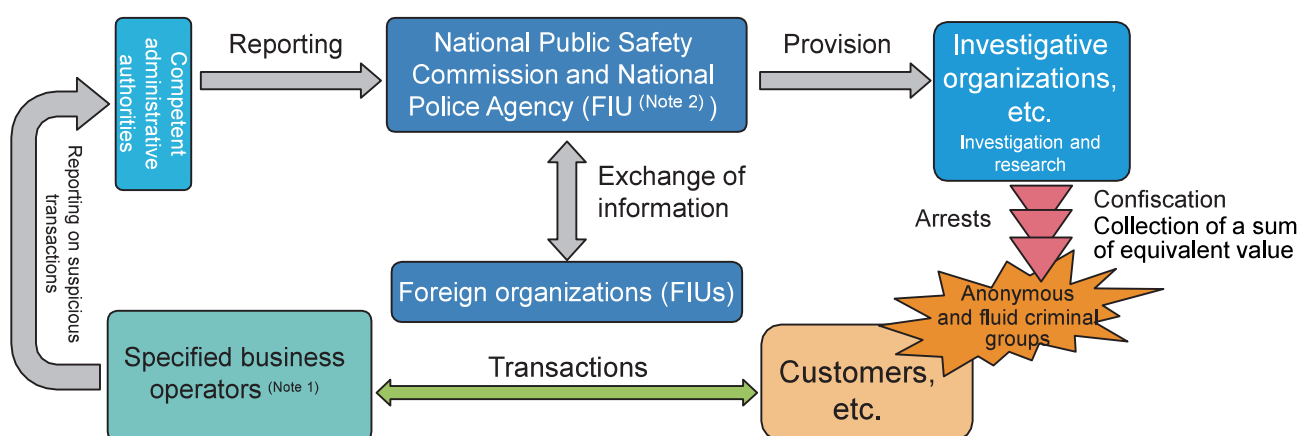
At the same time, the National Public Safety Commission and the National Police Agency are aggregating, organizing, and analyzing information about suspicious transactions in accordance with the Act on Prevention of Transfer of Criminal Proceeds. In more concrete terms, they make use of information about suspicious transactions that has been reported, information accumulated by the police, published information, and other types of information to reveal the actual state of anonymous and fluid criminal groups that have repeatedly committed a wide variety of criminal financing activities in recent years.

The results of comprehensive analyses of information about suspicious transactions are provided to related investigative organizations and other relevant parties. The analytical results provided by the National Police Agency to investigative organizations and other parties have increased year-on-year, reaching a record high of 21,730 in 2023.

**Chart F-17** Illustration of the typical flow of funds in a criminal organization



**Chart F-18** Flow from reporting on suspicious transactions to provision of information about them to investigative organizations, etc.



Note 1: "Specified business operators" refers to the business operators stipulated in Article 2-2 of the Act on Prevention of Transfer of Criminal Proceeds.

Note 2: FIU stands for "Financial Intelligence Unit." An FIU is an organization that each country establishes to aggregate and analyze information about suspicious transactions and to provide the results to investigative organizations, etc. Japan's FIU is under the control of the National Public Safety Commission.



Moreover, the police have been implementing crackdowns with the goal of imposing more appropriate punishments—for example, by proactive application of the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime (Concealment/Receipt of Proceeds of Crime, etc.), which introduced stricter penalties in December 2022.

In addition, there are cases in which dummy companies are used to conceal criminal proceeds obtained from fraud and other crimes as well as for other purposes. The police are implementing crackdowns on them and working in cooperation with related organizations to take necessary measures to prevent such acts.

CASE

A 22-year-old unemployed man acted as a “ukeko,” “withdrawer,” “collector,” and “transporter” for a wide-area criminal group based in the Philippines. He committed communications fraud and other crimes, transferring cash worth about one million yen—the criminal proceeds that the group had obtained through theft, robbery, and other criminal activities—to a bank account controlled by the group’s mastermind under a false name in May 2022. In May 2023, the man was arrested for violating the Act on Punishment of Organized Crimes and Control of Proceeds of Crime (concealment of proceeds of crime, etc.) (Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department)

7 Promoting More Personal Measures That Can Be Taken to Prevent Damage

The National Policy Agency has been promoting measures to prevent the utilization of criminal tools by anonymous and fluid criminal groups, including various types of telephone- and name-list-related measures. Given the fact that anonymous and fluid criminal groups make telephone calls and home visits at random to commit fraud and other crimes, more personal measures such as the following are being promoted.

(1) Measures that prevent elderly people from receiving telephone calls from criminal groups at home

Many anonymous and fluid criminal groups finance themselves through communications fraud, robberies, and thefts targeting elderly people. In these criminal activities, the criminals often make calls to the landline telephones of victims. To prevent such crimes, it is vital to take measures to block criminals’ calls to potential victims’ landline telephone numbers.

From May 2023, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone East Corporation and Nippon Telegraph and Telephone West Corporation (hereinafter referred to as “NTT”) started to offer free-of-charge Number Display (Note 1) and Number Request (Note 2) services mainly to subscribers age 70 and over, as well as to exempt from change fees those wishing to change their telephone numbers because of criminal damages.

The police also support the utilization of these services, and are working to ensure that the details of such NTT initiatives are known to target households—for example, through police activities, including neighborhood patrols and informing people.

In addition, a variety of other initiatives are being promoted, including encouraging people to keep their answering machines on and facilitating the installation of devices equipped with functions such as automatic phone call recording as well as audio warning and rejection of spam calls.



Public relations material about the Number Display and other services

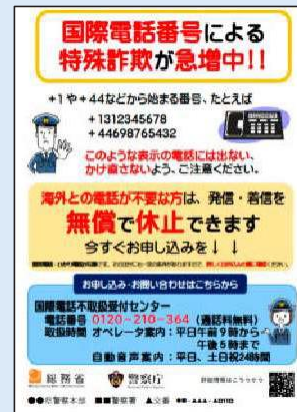
Note 1: A service that shows the caller’s telephone number on the telephone’s display before one answers the phone.  
2: With this service, a pre-recorded announcement will ask any callers who have chosen to stop their numbers from being displayed to remove the block and try calling again.



## MEMO

## Measures against communications fraud involving the abuse of international telephone numbers

Since July 2023, there has been a rapid surge in cases of communications fraud utilizing international telephone numbers. Three international telephone companies (Note 1) provide a service that allows subscribers to cancel international telephone service through the International Telephone Service Suspension Center (Note 2). Landline and Hikari Denwa subscribers can apply for the suspension service, free of charge, to block international telephone calls. The police are implementing public relations activities to inform subscribers who are not expecting to make or receive international phone calls and other people about the center as well as working to encourage more people to apply for the suspension service, while providing elderly and other households that have refrained from applying for the service because the procedure is too cumbersome to do themselves or for other reasons with the support that they require to complete the contract procedure—for example, distribution of application forms, envelopes, and so on.



Public relations material to alert people about communications fraud that uses international telephone numbers

## (2) Measures to prevent people from keeping cash at home

Many robberies, thefts, communications fraud, and so forth target the cash that elderly people keep inside their homes. To prevent such crimes, the police are carrying out public relations and awareness-building activities in cooperation with financial institutions and other related parties to give people a better understanding of the risks of keeping a large amount of cash at home, as well as preventative measures, such as utilization of savings accounts.

## MEMO

## Comprehensive Measures to Protect People from Frauds

Thus far, the Government of Japan has promoted public-private joint efforts to bust communications fraud and other crimes by working in collaboration with financial institutions, convenience stores, and other related parties to prevent people from falling victim to such crimes and carrying out measures to make mobile phone, call-forwarding, and other services less vulnerable to criminal use, in accordance with 'Plan to Combat "It's Me" Fraud' (adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Measures against Crime on June 25, 2019) and plan for emergency measures against robbery and special fraud cases involving the recruitment of perpetrators on social media (adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Measures against Crime on March 17, 2023).

At the same time, as social media, cashless payment services, and other new technologies have come into increasingly widespread use, recent years have seen the rapid sophistication and diversification of fraud techniques, taking advantage of new technologies. In particular, damage caused by investment/romance fraud via social media and phishing, in addition to communications fraud, has been expanding, and it has already reached an alarming level.

This is the backdrop against which the Government of Japan evolved the aforementioned two plans into Comprehensive Measures to Protect People from Frauds (adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Measures against Crime on June 18, 2024), which summarizes the measures that the government should take to make full-scale efforts to bust communications fraud, investment/romance fraud via social media, and phishing so as to take even more powerful measures in a swifter, more precise manner.

In line with this plan, the police are planning to promote intensive measures in collaboration with related administrative authorities, business operators, and other involved parties, while strengthening crackdowns and fact-finding efforts targeting anonymous and fluid criminal groups suspected of involvement in various types of fraud and other crimes in order to protect citizens from such crimes.

Chart F-19

Main items included in Comprehensive Measures to Protect People from Frauds

## 1. Measures to prevent people from becoming victims

## Investment/romance fraud via social media

- > Effective public relations, awareness building, and other activities that consider the crime situation, etc.
- > Promoting effective ad screening and other measures by social media operators, etc.
- > Promoting appropriate responses, such as eliminating spoofed ads, etc.
- > Obliging large-scale platform operators to take necessary measures to accelerate deletions, and to increase their managerial transparency

## Anti-phishing measures

- > Encouraging utilization of sender domain authentication technologies (e.g., DMARC)
- > Pre-emptive measures that take into consideration the characteristics of phishing sites

## Measures against communications fraud

- > Enhancing the system for accepting applications for cancellation of international telephone service
- > Promoting measures against inappropriate utilization of social media

## 2. Measures to prevent people from getting involved in crimes

- > Promoting the collection, deletion, and control, etc., of information about "shady part-time jobs," etc.
- > Education and awareness building to prevent young people from casually becoming involved in part-time criminal activities

## 3. Measures to deprive criminals of tools

- > Facilitating arrests through cooperation with financial institutions
- > Implementing measures to prevent criminal use of electronic money
- > Enhancing measures to prevent abuse of savings accounts, etc.
- > Promoting the confiscation and protection of crypto-assets

## 4. Measures to prevent criminals from escaping

- > Strengthening systems for crackdowns and fact-finding efforts on anonymous and fluid criminal groups
- > Enhancing referrals by social media operators
- > Promoting detection of overseas bases, etc.
- > Promoting initiatives to prevent misuse of corporations for money laundering

Note 1: KDDI CORPORATION, NTT Communications Corporation, and SoftBank Corp.

Note 2: <https://www.kokusai-teishi.com/>



# Section 3 Future Prospects

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups are a new form of criminal organization with peculiar characteristics, such as anonymization of the core part that saps criminal proceeds from diverse financing activities and the fluidity of perpetrators, who are recruited on social media to commit crimes on a case-by-case basis. As described in Section 2 of Part 1, the diverse financing activities carried out by these groups include communications fraud and other crimes that have been causing increasing damage, as well as robberies and other violent crimes that have been causing great anxiety to citizens. To alleviate people's worries, arresting and deterring these criminals are urgent tasks.

Given such circumstances, the following are the challenges that the police should place even greater focus on in the future.

## **(1) Intensive fact-finding efforts and crackdowns**

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The diverse financing activities of anonymous and fluid criminal groups appear to be growing to encompass a range that is even broader than before, from communications fraud, investment/romance fraud via social media, robberies, and adult-entertainment-business-related offenses to cybercrime. To undermine and destroy these groups, which are continually diversifying their activities, it is necessary to aggregate and analyze information about criminal groups collected by police forces across Japan to obtain a picture of these groups and to carry out crackdowns, such as arresting their masterminds, completely depriving them of their criminal proceeds, and blocking their sources of funding through the concerted efforts of the entire police force of Japan working under a united command based on analytical results. In this regard, as described in Section 2, prefectural police departments are now working beyond the boundaries of various sectors to carry out fact-finding efforts to identify the details of the activities of anonymous and fluid criminal groups, such as the criminal tricks they use and their financing sources, and to clear criminal cases to crack down on the masterminds. These efforts are now beginning to yield results.

## **(2) Measures against misuse of new communication technologies and scientific technologies**

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One factor that makes it difficult to profile and crack down on anonymous and fluid criminal groups is that these groups continuously sophisticate their activities by introducing new technologies in response to advances in communication technologies and scientific technologies, such as social media and other highly anonymous means of communication and the utilization of crypto-assets for money laundering.

The police must make optimal use of the technological capabilities of police forces to further sophisticate countermeasures—for example, through the development of human resources well-versed in communications technologies and scientific technologies—so as not to be outdone by anonymous and fluid criminal groups, which continue to transform in line with social changes.

## **(3) Perpetual readjustment**

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Broadly based, agile mobilization of police forces is essential to control communications fraud and other wide-area financing activities carried out by anonymous and fluid criminal groups. In this regard, as described in Section 2, the TAIT system has just been established to enable each prefectural TAIT team to carry out the necessary investigations in their own jurisdiction at the request of other prefectural police departments in order to facilitate more effective investigations into the communications fraud occurring in different parts of Japan. In the future, it will be vital to make the most of these investigative systems to further implement intensive crackdowns, going beyond the boundaries of the various prefectural police departments.

Also, in April 2024, the National Police Agency established the position of Commissioner-General's Secretariat Director (for Measures Against Communications Fraud and Anonymous and Fluid Criminal Groups) to enable the various sectors to work as one to further promote cross-sectoral measures under the director's command.

#### (4) Strengthening of partnerships with related organizations and groups

Implementing effective measures against anonymous and fluid criminal groups inevitably requires partnerships with related organizations. Given the possibility that anonymous and fluid criminal groups may include groups of juvenile delinquents and foreign national delinquents, in addition to police initiatives, full-scale concerted efforts of related organizations, groups, and other involved parties must be carried out to prevent young people and foreign nationals from joining such groups and to protect the elderly and the general public from crimes committed by anonymous and fluid criminal groups. To this end, Comprehensive Measures to Protect People from Frauds has just been established by the Government of Japan. It is necessary to promote measures in accordance with the measures.

Anonymous and fluid criminal groups have been causing increasing damage to citizens and circumventing crackdowns by changing their criminal tricks, means of communication among members, organizational structures, and other aspects in line with changes in social trends and advances in scientific technologies.

In addition to conventional methods of investigation, using new investigative measures, the police will coordinate efforts to effectively uncover and boost crackdowns on anonymous and fluid criminal groups.