

Information on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development

1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

At the 8th Meeting of the SDGs Promotion Headquarters held in December 2019, “SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles”, which are a mid-to-long term national strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs both domestically and internationally by 2030, were revised for the first time since its formulation in 2016. The revised version of the SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles note that realizing gender equality and mainstreaming a gender perspective are indispensable as cross-sectoral issues in achieving all goals, and they should be included and reflected in all measures.

The government of Japan is under the process of formulating the “Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality” based on the Basic Act for a Gender Equal Society (1999). “The Basic Approach in Formulating the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (Draft)” (July 2020), formulated by the Specialist Committee composed of experts under the national machinery, the Council for Gender Equality, includes aims to achieve a “society that cooperates with the international community by incorporating the perspectives of gender equality and active participation of women in all fields, and by making efforts consistent with the realization of an inclusive and sustainable world under the SDGs”. In addition, as specific efforts, it includes coordination with a wide range of stakeholders, and also the global indicators to appropriately grasp the achievement level of SDG 5, based on the “SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles”.

2. What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?

The Headquarters for the Empowerment of Women, led by the Prime Minister and composed of all ministers, adopted the "Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women 2020," to reflect efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment in the budgeting process (gender budgeting).

“ESG Investing” integrates ESG factors including women's empowerment into investment decisions and aims at improving long-term investment returns. Through public relations and awareness-raising for actors such as corporate managers about how information on women's empowerment in corporations applies to investment decisions, corporations are encouraged to take voluntary measures for women's empowerment.

3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?

Japan promotes an increase in women's participation in the decision-making process based on the current “Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality”.

Specific measures are as follows:

a) In the field of politics, in order to promote the introduction of effective positive actions in political parties, the government conducts necessary research, provides relevant information and actively encourages political parties to implement voluntary measures.

b) In order to promote the steady advancement of women in the central government based on the promotion targets set in the “Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality”, the following measures were taken in 2019-2020:

- ✓ Introduce examples of multilinear personnel management practices in ministries and agencies to encourage female employees to balance career design and life events.
- ✓ The Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs provides training to motivate female staff and improve the mindset of management staff with regards to the promotion of women.
- ✓ The Prime Minister's Office issued instructions to the top management of each ministry and conducted a survey of employees to determine factors that hinder female employees' motivation for promotions and their intention to continue working for the ministry. The results were made public.
- ✓ As it is important to share the burden of care work, such as housework and childcare, the government has set a policy to allow all male employees who have a child born to take at least one month's leave for childcare, which has been implemented since April 2020. To foster this project and appeal to civil society, a photo exhibition of male staff fathers was held by initiative of the Minister in Charge of the National Civil Service, in collaboration with UN Women's Japanese office for the #HeForShe@home initiative.

c) The National Personnel Authority engages in recruitment activities for female students in partnership with each ministry. The National Personnel Authority approaches managerial personnel and female employees in order to raise awareness and improve the working environment for female employees.

d) To facilitate women's participation and advancement in the workplace, the Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement was enacted in 2015 and enforced from April 2016. Under the Act, national and local governments and private enterprises with 301 or more permanent employees are required to develop and announce an action plan based on an analysis of the situation concerning the status of their female employees, and to publish information concerning the promotion of women. There is a government certification for employers who excel in promoting women's empowerment.

The law was revised in 2019 to further accelerate the efforts to facilitate the promotion of women in the workplace. The revised Act has (i) expanded the scope of employers required to prepare an action plan and publish information (expanding from private enterprises with 301 or more employees to 101 or more employees), (ii) expanded and strengthened the scope of employers required to publish information on the promotion of women, and (iii) established a special government issued certification for employers who excel in promoting women's empowerment (the revised Act will take effect on 1 June 2020, and thus the expansion of scope of private enterprises will take effect on 1 April 2022).

e) In the area of education and research, in order to increase the number of women in senior positions, the Japanese government has taken measures such as encouragement of spontaneous actions for bolstering women's leadership, and support for human resource development.

The above-mentioned "The Basic Approach in Formulating the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (Draft)" (July 2020) set an aim of lessening the disproportionate representation of men in leadership positions in the 2030s in order to create a society in which anyone can be an active participant regardless of their gender.

4. What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?

The "Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women 2020" (elaborated in Q.2) specifies our recognition of the negative socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as follows:

a) During the stay-at-home period and temporary business closures, there are concerns that women bear a greater burden of unpaid work and that domestic violence has increased and become more serious due to anxiety and stress.

b) Service sectors such as restaurant businesses and tourism, which have many female workers, have been severely damaged, and female workers are at higher risk of more serious job displacement.

c) Women and girls are vulnerable to the pandemic in various ways. Therefore, special consideration is needed in taking measures for women and girls in the emergency response and recovery period.

d) The pandemic has expanded remote jobs and businesses, which has brought us new possibilities for women to play more active roles.
Also, the expansion of remote work is an opportunity for men to share in unpaid care work.

Specific measures are as follows:

To protect workers' employment, the Japanese government expanded and increased the generosity of the Employment Adjustment Subsidy, which provides firms with financial support to cover the cost of special paid leave due to temporary closures. The programme was extended to non-regular workers who are not covered by employment insurance. The subsidy rates for hours not worked increased to a maximum of 100% for SMEs and to 75% for larger firms. The government also increased the maximum benefit from JPY 8,330 to JPY 15,000 a day per employee. In addition, the Japanese government has introduced a new scheme to pay 80% of the wage paid before leave directly to workers of SMEs who have not been paid their leave allowance, even though their employer ordered them to take leave.

In response to COVID-19, in order to enable anxious pregnant workers to continue working, give birth and rear their children, the Japanese government revised the guideline on measures for maternity health care pursuant to the Act on the Securing of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment. Pursuant to the revised guideline, if doctors diagnose that a pregnant worker is stressed due to COVID-19, the employer must implement necessary measures such as allowing them to take temporary absence from work, for example.

According to the revised guideline, the Japanese government has introduced a subsidy. If employers introduce to their companies a paid leave system for pregnant workers ordered to take leave by a medical professional, the government will provide a subsidy to compensate those employers. The subsidy amounts to JPY 250,000 for paid leave of 5 days or more and less than 20 days. After 20 days, an additional JPY 150,000 is paid every 20 days, up to a limit of JPY 1,000,000. This subsidy can apply for up to 20 workers per one enterprise.

In order to promote a rapid move to telework for operations able to do so, a subsidy for firms was introduced covering 50% of the cost of introducing telework up to JPY 1,000,000. The subsidy also covers the cost of creating or changing work rules and training workers, etc.

5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g., healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?

Japan has introduced a subsidy to compensate employers for providing workers with paid leave due to school or child care closures in response to COVID-19. The government also increased the maximum benefit from JPY 8,330 to JPY 15,000 per day per employee.

Self-employed workers who are unable to work due to school or child care closures are entitled to benefits. The government also increased the benefits from JPY 4,100 to JPY 7,500 per day.

Employed workers who are infected with or suspected to be infected with the COVID-19 virus and who have to take time off from work are eligible for a sick-leave allowance financed by insurers of public health insurance (for all firms that join the "Health Insurance" system) provided that those workers fulfill certain requirements.

For those who are enrolled in national health insurance, this allowance may be paid to those who are infected with the coronavirus. However, this may vary based on regulations set forth by each municipality.

Special loans exist, such as emergent small amount funds, for households that are struggling for their living expenses due to temporary halt of work or unemployment caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic spreads.

Those who experienced reduction of income from the effects of the novel coronavirus can be approved for reduction or exemption of tax or premium payments for national

health insurance, national pension, medical insurance system for the elderly aged 75 or over, and long-term care insurance.

As measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Government intends to subsidize necessary expenses to provide consultation support for the Women's Consuling Offices using videoconferencing and SNS to establish a system of contact, purchase masks and disinfectants for infection prevention, and to secure enough space to avoid close contact with other people.

6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., care subsidies, paid leave)?

Temporary special benefits of JPY 10,000 per child will be paid to eligible households. Temporary special benefits are paid to low-income single-parent households where the single parent is the sole caregiver and source of income. These temporary special benefits can be up to JPY 50,000 per household, and JPY 30,000 per child after the second child. An additional JPY 50,000 will be provided to households whose incomes have declined.

Japan has introduced a subsidy to compensate small and medium enterprises for providing workers with paid leave due to family care and preparing the environment for workers who have to take care of their family in response to COVID-19. This subsidy amounts to JPY 200,000 for paid leave of 5 days or more and less than 10 days, and JPY 350,000 for 10 days or more. This applies to up to 5 workers per one enterprise.

7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?

On the Cabinet Office website, we are providing information on trends in the international community, including the United Nations documents, on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women.

A wide range of information and opinions will be exchanged at the upcoming Liaison Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality, composed of more than 100 people from the fields of economics, labor, education, media, women's groups, NPOs, NGOs and academia.

8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?

In the context of a follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Japan has taken steps to further improve gender-responsive data collection, such as the implementation of official statistical activities based on the "Master Plan Concerning the Development of Official Statistics" (Cabinet decision in June 2020), collecting statistical data "for objectively comprehending the situation of men and women (gender statistics)". The UN Statistics Division has indicated the importance of taking into account the gender perspective in the process of producing various statistics in its Gender Statistics manual.

Also, in Japan, the “Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality” (Cabinet decision on December 25, 2015) and the “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Implementation Guiding Principles” (Decision by the SDGs Promotion Headquarters on December 22, 2016) call for relevant efforts including comprehension of sex-disaggregated data from the viewpoint of enhancing gender statistics. Taking into account such political needs, the government is required to analyze sex-disaggregated data and promote the production and provision of statistics that contribute to comprehension and analysis of data by age and by prefecture as well.

The Government of Japan plans to conduct research and analysis about the different impacts on employment and daily life by gender caused by the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19-related measures on the Formation of a Gender Equal Society.