

Key topic

The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality “Toward a Reiwa Society Where All Women and Girls Can Thrive and Achieve Their Full Potential”

The Japanese government approved The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality: Toward a Reiwa Society Where All Women and Girls Can Thrive and Achieve Their Full Potential (hereinafter “the Fifth Plan”) through a Cabinet decision on December 25, 2020. Based on the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society, the plan establishes a basic policy direction and specific initiatives to be achieved by FY2025 as well as 89 targets.

The Fifth Plan starts off by stating the following four items as visions of an ideal society.

- (1) A fair, highly diverse, vibrant, and sustainable society in which men and women can fully display their individuality and abilities
- (2) A society in which the human rights of men and women are respected and people can live with dignity
- (3) A society in which work and daily life are balanced and both men and women can lead fulfilling lives at work, in society, and at home
- (4) A society that works with the international community in achieving the inclusive and sustainable world envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The plan then arranges and presents specific policies based on three mainstays: “expansion of women’s participation in all fields,” “realization of safe and secure living,” and “establishment of the foundation for a gender-equal society.”

I. Expansion of women’s participation in all fields

The Fifth Plan puts forth four initiatives to

expand women’s participation in all fields. They are (i) expansion of women’s participation in policy decision-making processes, (ii) promotion of gender equality in employment and work-life balance, (iii) promotion of gender equality in the community, and (iv) promotion of gender equality in science and technology and academic fields. With regard to (i), the plan notes that women account for 51.3% of Japan’s population and 51.7% of its eligible voters and that the public’s values are becoming more diversified. And it states that the participation of both women and men in all fields and advancement of women’s activities will “create an affluent and vibrant society that can adapt to changes in socioeconomic circumstances and lead to a society that is comfortable for all people by securing diverse viewpoints.”

1. Raising the proportion of women in leadership positions to “30% by the early 2020s”

In 2003, the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office (established in 1994) put forth a target of achieving “the proportion of women in leadership positions in all areas of society would reach at least 30%” by 2020. The Fifth Plan states that, although active initiatives have been implemented by the public and private sectors, “it cannot be said that achievement is near at present.” For reasons behind this analysis, the plan mentions the difficulty of balancing the duties of being a candidate or lawmaker with family life in the case of politics, the fact that a “pipeline” for the advancement of women to management and executive positions is still being built in the economic field, and the existence of

stereotyped perceptions of gender roles in society as a whole. The Fifth Plan sets forth a goal of realizing a society in which gender ratio is balanced among people in leadership positions and in which everyone can be active regardless of gender before the 2030s. Toward this target, it sets the “promotion of measures aimed at raising the proportion of women in leadership positions to about 30% of the total as early as possible during the 2020s” as a milestone. Looking at specific initiatives, the government will, based on the Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field (promulgated and put into effect in 2018), urge political parties to set a goal of striving to achieve a proportion of female candidates in national elections at least 35% by 2025. It will encourage local government assemblies to develop environments that make it easier for male and female members to play active roles. The focus here includes balancing assembly activities with home life and preventing harassment. The government will also urge concerned bodies to raise the percentage of women among all judges, including supreme court justices.

2. The increasing importance of work-life balance

Thus far, the government has promoted corporate initiatives based on the Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement in the Workplace and laws concerning work-style reform as well as active public/private initiatives that include developing organizations to handle childcare and supporting work-life balance. The Fifth Plan addresses the current situation by pointing out that there are 2.31 million women who desire to work but do not seek employment due to child-rearing and nursing care duties (2019). Additionally, the plan finds that “it is likely that, due to stereotyped perceptions of gender roles, a considerable number of women do not desire employment despite having sufficient vocational ability.” It states that work-life balance obtained through diverse and flexible ways of working (including responses to childbirth, child-rearing, nursing care, and other duties) is becoming increasingly important in promoting gender equality in employment.

3. Setting a 70% target for the annual paid leave-taking rate

As a concrete measure for realizing work-life balance, the Fifth Plan mentions the strengthening of supervision and guidance systems to ensure the provision of legally established working conditions and rectify long working hours. It sets a target of keeping the proportion of employees working 60 hours or more per week at no more than 5.0%. Additionally, it calls for intensive publicity with attention to the seasons during which taking consecutive days off is comparatively easier. This aims to cultivate opportunities for taking annual paid leave as established in the Labor Standards Act. And the plan puts forth a target of achieving a 70% annual paid leave-taking rate¹ for employees in all companies by 2025. Further, to encourage the introduction of work-interval system which ensures workers get enough rest on a daily basis, the plan calls for widespread publicity of introduction manuals and leading examples based on the characteristics of occupational classifications and business categories (see Table 1).

4. Setting a 30% target for the male childcare leave-taking rate

As an initiative for realizing diverse and flexible ways of working, the Fifth Plan calls for ensuring the execution of the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act so that workers can continue employment by taking childcare leave and nursing care leave. Specifically, it calls for the introduction of new frameworks that encourage men to take leave immediately after their spouses give birth. Furthermore, it calls for study toward making it mandatory for employers to provide notification of leave systems to individual workers who report their own or spouse’s pregnancy/childbirth and confirm those workers’ intention to take leave, as well as for study toward promoting public announcements of male workers’ childcare leave rates in companies. It will submit the necessary bill to the ordinary Diet session of 2021. The plan includes as a target the achievement of a 30% childcare leave-taking rate among men in private enterprises² by 2025.

Table 1. The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality: Items, current states, and targets (in employment)

Item	Current state	Target (deadline)
Proportion of employees working 60 hours or more per week	Total: 6.4%	5.0% (2025)
	Male: 9.8%	
	Female: 2.3% (2019)	
Annual paid leave-taking rate	Total: 56.3%	70% (2025)
	Male: 53.7%	
	Female: 60.7% (2019 or FY2018)	
Proportion of enterprises providing opportunities for labor and management to discuss working hours, etc.	64.0% (2019)	All enterprises (2025)
Telework	—	(Note 1)
Male workers' childcare leave-taking rates in private enterprises	7.48% (FY2019)	30% (2025)
Number of enterprises earning the "Kurumin" certification mark (Note 2)	3,448 (End of September 2020)	4,300 (2025)
Employment rate for females aged between 25 and 44	77.7% (2019)	82% (2025)
Employment continuation rate for females before and after birth of first child	53.1% (2015)	70% (2025)
Proportion of females in each managerial position in private enterprises		
Section chief level or equivalent	18.9% (2019)	30% (2025)
Director level or equivalent	11.4% (2019)	18% (2025)
Department manager level or equivalent	6.9% (2019)	12% (2025)
Number of enterprises receiving certification ("Eruboshi" certification) based on the Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement in the Workplace	1,134 (End of September 2020)	2,500 (2025)
Proportion of females among people starting new businesses (Note 3)	27.7% (2017)	At least 30% (2025)

Source: Cabinet Office, "The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality" https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/whitepaper/pdf/5th_bpg.pdf.

Notes: 1. Specific items and targets will be established with consideration for the situation of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent changes in social circumstances.

2. An "enterprises earning the 'Kurumin' certification mark" is an enterprise that has been certified as supporting child-rearing based on the Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-Generation Children.

3. A "person starting a new business" is a person who changed jobs or took a new job within the past one year and who is currently an executive of a company, etc., or self-employed person who started a new business on his or her own.

5. Preventing harassment against job-hunting students

The Fifth Plan seeks to ensure the execution of the Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and

Treatment between Men and Women in Employment; Act on Childcare Leave, Caregiver Leave, and Other Measures for the Welfare of Workers Caring for Children or Other Family Members; and Act on

Comprehensive Promotion of Labor Measures, and Stabilization of Employment of Employees, and Enrichment of Their Working Lives as well as related guidelines. This is based on recognition that the realization of a society in which people desiring to work can play active roles regardless of their sex is premised on securing equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in employment. Such a society is achieved by eradicating discriminatory treatment on the basis of sex, sexual harassment in the workplace, and unfair treatment and harassment for reasons attributable to pregnancy, childbirth, childcare leave, or nursing care leave. Moreover, the plan notes that students engaged in job-hunting activities frequently encounter sexual harassment by company employees. To prevent such instances, the plan calls for efforts to ascertain the facts in surveys relating to the start of employment/recruiting activities. Also, concerned ministries and agencies will work together in making appropriate responses (such as promoting public knowledge and awareness of desired initiatives indicated in guidelines that are based on the Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment and accepting requests for consultation at the general labor consultation desks of prefectural labor bureaus).

6. Supporting the development of female executives and managers

The Fifth Plan calls for supporting corporate initiatives to expand women's participation in the workplace, correct gender-based disparities, and encourage women to demonstrate their abilities. Specifically, it urges the ascertainment and analysis of women's activities, establishment of targets based on the results, formulation of "plan of action for employers" aimed at achieving those targets, and the disclosure of information on their activities. It also calls for supporting the development of female executives and managers in companies through the clarification of senior position-oriented career paths that are adapted to life plans, the development and implementation of career development assistance programs, and the building of female manager

networks. It sets target proportions for female managers in private enterprises at 18% at the section chief level and 12% at the department manager level by 2025.³

7. Adherence to the policy of aiming for a minimum wage with a national weighted average of 1,000 yen

Non-regular employment, such as part-time employment, has positive significance in terms of meeting diverse employment needs. However, the fact that the percentage of non-regular employment in all employment is higher for women than men is a factor that makes women more prone to fall into poverty. Additionally, this situation, coupled with disparities between regular employees and non-regular employees, causes differences in treatment between men and women. The Fifth Plan seeks to eliminate unfair differences in treatment between regular employees and non-regular employees within the same company or organization in accordance with the Act on Improvement of Personnel Management and Conversion of Employment Status for Part-Time Workers and Fixed-Term Workers (executed in April 2020). It also calls for adherence to a policy aiming to raise the minimum wage to a national weighted average of 1,000 yen as soon as possible while persistently maintaining an environment that facilitates wage increases by raising productivity throughout the Japanese economy and by optimizing business relationships, etc.

8. Building fair and highly diverse regional communities

The Fifth Plan promotes gender equality in Japan's regions. The national government aims to build fair, highly diverse, and vibrant regional communities by eliminating deep-rooted stereotyped perceptions of gender roles in regional areas; incorporating and reflecting women's viewpoints in urban development, workplaces, etc.; and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes. These steps will be taken by working closely with local governments; regional communities; economic

and labor circles; organizations associated with agriculture, forestry, and fishery; and women's organizations. Specifically, the plan will support measures taken by local governments in accordance with regional circumstances through subsidies for women's empowerment in regions. These measures include establishing diverse and flexible ways of working, training female human resources to handle digital technologies, supporting women grappling with challenges and difficulties, relearning and career development, and business startups.

9. Fostering female human resources in science and technology to lead the next generation

Although the percentage of women on research and technical jobs is growing, it still remains low compared to other countries. Percentage of women in science and engineering in the major fields of study among undergraduate and graduate students is comparatively low. Recognizing that systematic and long-term increases in the number of women proceeding to careers in research and technology will be required, the Fifth Plan calls for promoting gender equality in science, technology, and academic fields and sets a target of raising the proportion of women among all researchers hired by universities to 20% in science and 15% in engineering by 2025. Additionally, it sets a target of achieving year-on-year increases in the proportion of women among students enrolled in the science and engineering departments of universities toward developing female human resources in science and engineering who lead the next generation. The plan will achieve these targets by raising awareness regarding the advantages of choosing science and engineering among female schoolchildren and their parents/guardians and teachers, and by encouraging their selection of science/engineering-oriented paths.

II. Realization of safe and secure living

The second mainstay policy for an ideal society is "realization of safe and secure living." Under the Fifth Plan, the government will tackle this from the following four angles.

1. Elimination of all forms of violence against women

The Fifth Plan notes that violence against women is a serious violation of human rights, and that eliminating violence through initiatives aimed at prevention and injury recovery is a key issue for building a gender-equal society. It thus calls for the further promotion of movements to eliminate violence against women and the cultivation of social norms that never permit violence. It also urges responses that consider victims' human rights (e.g., by protecting privacy and ensuring safety and security) at municipal spousal violence counseling and support centers. It sets a target of increasing the number of such centers to 150 by 2025 (119 centers in April 2020).

2. Study toward reexamination of the child support system

The plan calls for providing support with respect to poverty and other livelihood difficulties from the standpoint of gender equality and creating an environment that respects diversity. To support independence through stability in employment and daily life, it also requests thoroughgoing efforts to secure equal opportunities and treatment for men and women, the elimination of wage gaps between men and women, and support for continued employment and reemployment among women. And it urges prevention of harassment against women and promotion of work-life balance. Additionally, it calls for support for re-employment of child-rearing women and increased application of vocational training and subsidies at "Mothers Hello Work" job placement centers (opened in April 2006) so that parents and children in single-parent families can live with peace of mind. Furthermore, to cope with the endless instances of unpaid child support between divorced parents, the plan encourages effective publicity and public awareness through videos and pamphlets to promote agreements on such payments. It also requires the implementation of surveys and studies to secure payments and the study of legal revisions to reexamine the child support system. The provision of attorney-led child

support consultations for single-parents in all prefectures, ordinance-designated cities, and core cities by FY2024 is set as a target.

3. Alleviation of the financial burden of infertility treatments

The Fifth Plan also provides support for lifelong health. It aims to develop systems providing specialized and comprehensive health and medical services adapted to women's mental and physical characteristics and promote linkage with welfare as part of the building of systems providing comprehensive health support. It will expand insurance coverage to alleviate the financial burden of infertility treatments. The plan will greatly expand the current subsidy system until insurance coverage is established. And it will enrich the functions of specialized infertility consultation centers with the aims of improving the supply of information on treatments for infertility and difficulty carrying pregnancy to term as well as consultation systems. It will also promote the development of workplace environments in which both men and women can balance work with infertility treatment. The establishment of infertility consultation centers in all prefectures, ordinance-designated cities, and core cities by FY2025 is set as a target.

4. Raising the proportion of women in disaster management councils to 30%

The Fifth Plan will also promote gender equality with respect to disaster prevention/reconstruction and environmental issues in order to realize safe and secure living. The national government will integrate gender perspectives into disaster responses, and it will share recognition with local governments that women (including young women) are major actors at each stage of preparation, initial response, evacuation, and recovery/reconstruction and provide support to ensure local governments' promotion of initiatives that incorporate gender perspectives. As a target, it sets the achievement of 30% female membership in prefectural disaster management councils and municipal disaster management

councils, respectively, by 2025.

III. Establishment of the foundation for a gender-equal society

The Fifth Plan's third mainstay for an ideal society concerns developing the foundation for a gender-equal society. The plan aims to tackle this from three angles: (1) development of systems based on gender perspectives, (2) promotion of men and women's awareness-raising and understanding of gender equality through education and the media, and (3) international cooperation and contributions concerning gender equality.

1. Study of systems that do not inhibit motivation to work

In Japan, a taxpayer who has the "claimable spouse" defined in the Income Tax Act is eligible for a tax deduction (spousal deduction). Upper limit of spousal deduction was raised in FY2017 Tax Reforms for the reason that the deduction inhibited motivation to work. The Fifth Plan calls for efforts to continue publicizing the system and smoothly applying it. Moreover, as part of a reexamination of the social security system, it aims to promote expanded insurance coverage for "category-3 insured persons" who are supported by "category-2 insured persons" under the national pension scheme for company employees, public servants, and the like. It intends to advance studies toward decreasing "category-3 insured persons" who are supposedly inhibited motivation to seek employment based on the thinking of "working within the scope of the spouse's support" (so-called "working hours adjustment"). Additionally, it has been pointed out that the spousal allowances that companies pay to workers who have spouses are a factor behind working hours adjustment. The plan mentions the importance of urging labor and management to examine their spousal allowance systems for making them more neutral with respect to spouses' working, and it intends to continue creating an environment for this purpose.

The plan will also develop legislation concerning families. In Japan, a couple that gets married must

adopt the same family name. At present, discussions are underway concerning the introduction of an optional system for married couples that will allow them to use separate surnames. Concerning concrete systems for married couples' surnames, the plan states the government will "examine further with paying close attention to the opinions of citizens at all levels and discussions in the Diet and based on judicial rulings." Under the existing system, former names may also be noted on personal identification documents. The plan calls for making the current system widely known and for ensuring that people who changed their surnames do not feel inconvenienced or disadvantaged through uniform application of administrative systems.

2. Promoting the appointment of women as school principals and vice principals

The Fifth Plan aims to promote men and women's awareness-raising and understanding of gender equality through education and the media. In the area of school education, it calls for action to promote the appointment of women as principals and vice principals and also women's participation in policy decision-making processes, and it sets as targets the attainment of a female proportion among primary and secondary education institution principals of 20% (15.4% in 2019) and among vice principals of 25% (20.5% in 2019) by 2025. In 2018 a problem discovered whereby the medical faculties of several universities conducted improper entrance exams that, for example, treated women and students who were retaking entrance exams unfairly or favored certain examinees. In light of this, the plan urges the disclosure of male-female pass rates for medical faculty entrance exams. It also calls for the active use of advertising and provision of content that contributes to gender equality in cooperation with newspapers, television, and internet media.

3. Collaboration and action toward achievement of the SDGs

The government established a Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Promotion Headquarters comprised of all government ministers in 2016. Based on the "SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles, Revised Edition" that were approved by the headquarters, the Fifth Plan calls for the promotion and implementation of measures to achieve the SDGs in cooperation with a broad range of stakeholders as part of international collaboration and contribution concerning gender equality. Moreover, with respect to uncompleted conventions that have a deep association with gender equality, such as the "Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958" (ILO Convention No. 111) and the "Convention concerning the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work" (ILO Convention No. 190), the plan calls for "conducting concrete studies to arrange issues that can become problematic in their conclusion and paying continuous and sustained efforts toward their ratification."

1. The Labor Standards Act stipulates that, beginning in April 2019, employers must ensure that all workers whose legally mandated annual paid leave amounts to ten days or more take at least five days off each year. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "General Survey on Working Conditions," the annual paid leave-taking rate in companies was 52.4% in 2019.
2. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management," the childcare leave-taking rate among male workers was 7.48% in FY2019. The childcare leave-taking rate among female workers stands at the 80% level, while that for men is low but rising (it was 7.48% in FY2019).
3. According to the Cabinet Office, the proportion of female managers in private enterprises in FY2020 was 11.4% at the director level and 6.9% at the department manager level.