

Charter and Action Guidelines to Promote Work-life Balance

Following deliberations by the Top-level Public/Private Council on the Work-life Balance, consisting of relevant Cabinet ministers, experts, and representatives of business, labor, and local government, a “Work-life Balance Charter” and “Action Guidelines to Promote the Work-life Balance” were established on December 18, 2007. In the years ahead, society as a whole needs to take positive action based on this Charter and Action Guidelines.

(For the text of the Charter and Action Guidelines, see the Cabinet Office website: http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/mge/wlb/index.html)

1. Work-life Balance Charter

The Charter maps out the overall course of national measures, defining a society in which work and family life are balanced as “a society in which each and every citizen can work and fulfill his or her responsibilities in the workplace while enjoying a sense of worth and fulfillment and at the same time being able to choose and realize various lifestyles at each stage of life—including during parenting and in middle and old age—in regard to their lives at home and in the community.” In line with this definition, the roles of interested parties are described as follows: 1) enterprises and workers should endeavor to work together to raise productivity and take voluntary action to change mindsets and cultures in the workplace and reform ways of working; 2) citizens should consider how to balance their own work and family lives and play an active role in the home and the community; 3) the Government should take active steps to promote and support the development of social momentum, establishment of an institutional framework, and development of necessary conditions; and 4) local governments should develop innovative measures tailored to conditions in their own locals.

2. Action Guidelines to Promote the Work-life Balance

The Action Guidelines set forth principles for effective action by employers and workers and measures for implementation by the central and local governments. To promote voluntary action in society as a whole, 14 numerical targets are set for attainment in five and 10 years' time, including targets for the labor force participation rates for young people, women, and older people, the proportion of employees working at least 60 hours per week, and the proportion of women remaining in employment after having their first child.

Promotion of Measures to Assist Work-life Balance

1. Promotion of Reform of Working Patterns

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is taking steps to encourage voluntary efforts by labor and management to improve working time arrangements, etc. This includes reducing overtime work and encouraging employees to take annual paid leave, in line with charters and codes of conduct, with a view to achieving a balance between work and life.

More specifically, support is provided for efforts to improve working time arrangements by small and medium enterprises using the Subsidy for Promoting the Improvement of Working Time Arrangements, while the Ministry also disseminates and publicizes “Guidelines for Improvement of Working Time Arrangements”, which set out necessary matters for employers to deal appropriately with improving working time arrangements.

2. Promotion of Measures to Support Balance of Work and Home

Upgrading the environment to ensure that it is easy for both men and women to continue working while bringing up children or looking after elderly relatives realizes the wishes of the individual and, by

extension, leads to the maintenance and improvement of Japan's dynamism. However, if one looks at the reality of the situation, one can see that the number of women who leave their jobs when they give birth to their first child has reached approximately 60%, among whom there are quite a few who quit their jobs because it is difficult to combine work with child-rearing. Moreover, irrespective of the fact that more than 30% of men wish to take childcare leave, the proportion of men who actually take childcare leave is still only 2.03% (FY2013 Basic Survey of Gender Equality in Employment Management).

Thus, there is a situation in which it is not possible for men and women to combine work with family life, and this is believed to be a factor behind the declining birth rate. Accordingly, in the Japan Revitalization Strategy decided upon by the Cabinet in June 2013, the numerical targets were set of achieving a continued employment rate for women around the time of the birth of their first child of 55%, and a rate of taking childcare leave among men of 13% by 2020. Moreover, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is implementing the following concrete measures.

1) Thorough publicizing of the amended Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave

The amended Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave entered into force on June 30, 2010. This obliged employers to implement a system of short-time working for workers caring for children under the age of three and institutionalizes their exemption from working outside their normal working hours, as well as creating additional childcare leave for parents and leave for taking care of family members. Moreover, mechanisms aimed at ensuring their legal effectiveness were established.

In order to support the upgrading of the workplace environment so that both men and women can continue working while bringing up children or caring for family members, efforts are

being made to ensure implementation and thoroughly publicize this amended Act. Moreover, prefectural labor bureaus provide the requisite advice, guidance or recommendations concerning disputes between workers and employers, when their assistance in resolving these is sought by one or both of the parties involved.

2) Promotion of measures by enterprises to support the development of the next generation

The Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-generation Children obliges general employers to formulate an action plan to support employees in combining work with child-rearing and to submit this to their prefectural labor bureau, as well as obliging them to advertise this and publicize it among their employees. The amendment entered into force in April 2011 and the scope of application of this obligation was expanded from companies with at least 301 regularly-employed employees to companies with at least 101 regularly-employed employees.

Moreover, enterprises that develop and implement appropriate action plans and meet certain requirements, such as attainment of their objectives, are accredited by the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare and allowed to use the "Kurumin" mark in recognition of their family friendliness.

Although this Act was a temporary legislative measure due to expire in FY2014, the 186th Ordinary Session of the Diet debated proposals to extend the validity of the Act by a further ten years and to create a system whereby, of the accredited companies, those making particularly significant efforts and meeting certain criteria would be given exceptional accreditation (the "Platinum Kurumin" mark). These and other proposals were included in the Amended Act on Advancement of Measures to Support Raising Next-generation Children, which was passed by the Diet on April 16, 2014 and took effect from April 1, 2015.

3) Initiatives to promote childcare leave by men

To encourage more men to take childcare

leave, the “Ikumen Project” has been implemented since 2010. The aim of the project is to create a society in which men can more positively enjoy raising their children and in which it is easy for them to take childcare leave. The image of “Ikumen”, men who play an active role in raising their children, is being publicized through a participation-based official website and distribution of PR materials. Meanwhile, attempts are being made to highlight positive case examples through “Ikumen Company Awards” for companies that actively promote a balance between childrearing and work for men and take steps to improve their work, “Ikuboss Awards” for

managers, and others. These steps are being taken to promote initiatives aimed at supporting a balance between childrearing and work for men in companies.

4) Support for development of workplaces that facilitate the work-life balance

In addition to 1), 2) and 3) above, the Government is working to develop conditions that facilitate the balancing of work and personal life through such measures as providing various subsidies to enterprises that promote balance, encouraging the spread of “family-friendly enterprises” through the “Equality and Work-life Balance Enterprises Recognition” program.