

Background

Reflecting the *Womenomics* agenda, which captures the Abe administration's emphasis on women's participation in society's key sectors as a measure to revitalize Japan's stagnating economy, the Gender Equality Bureau (GEB) under Japan's central government designed several measures to advance female participation level to 30% by 2020 in both public and private sectors. However, economic participation has regressed in comparison to other countries. According to an OECD 2015 report, only 2.1% of board seats were held by women in Japan, ranking the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region; in addition, women filled only 3.3% of managerial positions in central government in 2014 and 7% in local governments.ⁱ To further address gender inequality and low female participation, Japan has enacted several key legislative initiatives, among which are the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace (2015),ⁱⁱ the 4th Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2015), and Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women (2015, 2017), all of which either incentivized or required hiring, retaining, and advancing of women through various measures. In 2015, Japan also started reporting its progress annually as part of APEC Individual Action Plans for Enhancement of the Ratio of Women's Representation in Leadership.

Gains

- Greater attention by both Houses to discuss the merits and ways of introducing voluntary quota systems in each political party, and central government's requests and guidelines for the local governments to set quotas.
- Both the majority party (LDP) and the largest minority party (DPJ) of Japan have funds to support female candidates
- Closer review of female participation in politics by the central government, such as the GEB's Female Political Participation Map, which outlines female political participation at the prefectural level since 2014.
- Increased efforts by central government to recruit women in public sectors, through target quotas, recruiting events and publications, and internship programs for female students in Kasumigaseki.
- Development of national programs for mid-level female employees in public sectors, such as "Career Up" seminars, "Female Management Skill Development Course," "Female Worker Promotion Advancement Seminars" and "Mentor Training" sessions held by the National Personnel Authority.
- Strategic adjustment of working hours and central government's promotion of the *Yukatsu* initiative for the local governments to shift the business day forward (to 8am-5pm) to encourage workers to go home early, addressing women's concerns for work-life balance, which has been adopted by 41 prefectures, 16 countries, and 114 cities.
- Impact on *Keidanren* (Japanese Business Federation) to reflect the government's efforts at the management level positions in private sectors by offering women training, mentorship and networking programs, management development course, increasing women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Greater involvement in international discussions and initiatives on improving women's participation in both public and private sectors, such as the GEB's efforts to compare data of female representation in politics at the international level and *Keidanren* female executives' mission to the UN headquarters in 2017 for roundtable discussions on women's advancement at work.^{iv}

Key Takeaway

While most categories in Japan's Individual Action Plans^v have not reached their respective target level yet, the quantitative data have shown some improvement during the past two years since the legislative branch and the GEB took more aggressive and strategic measures to enhance women's participation. Largely led by the central government's initiatives, the top-down approach to tackle gender inequality influenced the local governments and private sectors like *Keidanren* to also comply with such initiatives, as exemplified by the wide adoption of *Yukatsu* initiatives. As demonstrated by such initiatives to improve work-life balance and to transform the culture to better accommodate women, the Japanese government is slowly progressing toward its 30% goal, not just in numbers but also in the quality of participation by women.

ⁱ <https://www.oecd.org/policy-briefs/japan--greater-gender-equality-for-more-inclusive-growth.pdf>

ⁱⁱ http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/lbp/pdf/promotion_of_woman.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.keidanren.or.jp/en/policy/2014/029_summary.html.

^{iv} <http://www.keidanren.or.jp/en/policy/2017/034.pdf>.

^v <https://www.apec.org/Groups/SOM-Steering-Committee-on-Economic-and-Technical-Cooperation/Working-Groups/Policy-Partnership-on-Women-and-the-Economy/PPWE-IAPs.aspx>; *see also* chart below:

	2015 IAP	2016 IAP	2017 IAP	2020 Goals
Female candidates to be members of the House of Representatives	16.6% (2014)	16.6% (2014)	16.6% (2014)	30%
Female candidates to be members of the House of Councilors	24.2% (2013)	24.2% (2013)	24.7% (2016)	30%
Women in government positions equivalent to director of central government ministries and agencies	3.3% (fiscal 2014)	3.5% (July 2015)	4.1% (July 2016)	7%
Women in positions equivalent to designated central government positions	2.8% (fiscal 2014)	3.0% (July 2015)	3.5% (July 2016)	5%
Female members in national advisory councils and committees	35.4% (2014)	36.7% (2015)	37.2% (2016)	40 – 60%
Female expert members in national advisory councils and committees	22.4% (2014)	24.8% (2015)	27.7% (2016)	30%
Women in positions equivalent to director of prefectural government office	7.2% (2014)	8.5% (2015)	9.2% (2016)	15%
Women in positions equivalent to director general or deputy director of prefectural government office	-	4.9% (2015)	5.5% (2016)	Approx. 10%
Women in positions equivalent to <i>director of municipalities office: city, town, or village government; [designated city]</i>	-	14.5% [13.4%] (2015)	15.6% [14.2%] (2016)	20%
Women in positions equivalent to <i>director general or deputy director of municipalities office: city, town, or village government; [designated city]</i>	-	6.9% [7.9%] (2015)	7.5% [8.5%] (2016)	Approx. 10%
Female members of prefectural government advisory councils and committees	30.3% (2014)	30.6% (2015)	31.2% (2016)	33.3% (short term); over 40%
Women positions equivalent to department director level or section manager level in independent administrative institution	8.3% (2014)	13.5% (2015)	14.1% (2016)	15%
Women executives of independent administrative institution	-	10.5% (2015)	13.1% (2016)	13%
Women in positions equivalent to section manager level in private corporations	-	9.2% (2014)	9.8% (2015)	15%
Women in positions equivalent to department manager level in private corporations	-	6.0% (2014)	6.2% (2015)	Approx. 10%
Women executives in listed company	-	2.8% (2015)	3.4% (2016)	5% (short term); 10%