Until the mid 1970’s, while the percentage of employed workers had gone up, the labour force* participation rate had declined due to a substantial decrease in the proportion of family-business employees, with an increase in the number of those who were primarily engaged in household chores.

Since the mid 1970s and onward, although the proportion of family-business employees had continued to decline, the proportion of those engaged in household chores had gone down and the rate of employed workers had continuously increased, with the labour force participation rate remaining at approximately 50%.

*Labour force refers to both employed persons and unemployed persons (without a job but looking for work through job seeking activities and ready to work if work is available) among the population of 15 years old or older.
From the data, the number of female employees in the “Agriculture, forestry and fisheries” was bigger than in other industries until 1965. Since then, the share of other industries, especially the “Financing and insurance, real estate, services” and the “Wholesale and retail trade, eating and drinking places” had increased significantly, to account for 48.6% and 27.3%, respectively, in 2012 of all female employees. A similar trend is seen in the data for males, although the share of the “Construction,” “Manufacturing,” “Electricity/gas/heat supply and water, transport and communications” industries is larger among male workers than among female workers.
Looking at the employment of wives in households in which the husband is employed (as a salaried worker), it can be seen that although in 1980 the number of single-income households (man was employed) was nearly double the number of dual-income households, in the 1990s the number of dual-income households surpassed the number of those in which only the man was employed, and there continues to be an upward trend in their number today.

The women’s labour force participation rate by age group, shows a M-shaped curve, that bottoms out in the 30s. That indicates many women still stop working at the time of marriage, childbirth, and child-rearing.
Women’s Labour Force Participation Rate by Age Group

Source:
1. Japan: Data from “Labour Force Survey 2012 (Basic Tabulation),” the ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
Other Countries: Data from “LABORSTA” and “ILOSTAT,” International Labour Organization
2. Data of Japan are as of 2012. Data of other countries are as of 2010 (except that data of population 65 years and over of Germany are as of 2008)
Notes:
1. “Labour force participation rate” = Proportion of labour force participation (Employed persons + Unemployed persons) in total population 15 years and over
2. “15-19 years old” of United States means the 16-19 years old

In Japan, 60% of women quit their jobs at the time of their first childbirth.
The Women’s labour participation rate in Western countries no longer shows M-shaped curve.

Work History of Wives before and after Giving Birth to Their First Child, by Year of Child’s Birth

Source:
Data from “The 14th National Fertility Survey (Survey of Married Couples),” the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research
Notes:
1. Survey target: First marriage couples whose first child is 1 to under 15 years old
2. Work history before and after giving birth
Continuous employment (using child care leave) : Employed when finding out about pregnancy, took child care leave, and employed when the child was 1 year old
Continuous employment (not using child care leave) : Employed when finding out about pregnancy, employed at the time the child was 1 year old, without taking child care leave
Cessation of employment upon becoming pregnant : Employed when finding out about pregnancy and unemployed at the time the child was 1 year old
Unemployed since before becoming pregnant : Unemployed when finding out about pregnancy and unemployed at the time the child was 1 year old

Although the proportion of women who use child care leave is increasing, the proportion of women who continue working before and after giving birth is not increasing.
It can also be seen that there are still many women who leave their jobs at the time of giving birth.
The graph indicates the declining proportion of regular staffs in recent years. Particularly, female regular staffs declined to less than half of the female labour force from 67.9% in 1985 to 45.5% in 2012.

With regard to the salary gap between male regular workers, and male and female short-time workers, the level of wages for male short-time workers and for female short-time workers in 2012 arrived at 55.2 and 50.5, respectively, based on the level of wages for male regular workers being at 100. The gap between regular and short-time workers remains wide and the level of wages for short-time workers remains very low.