

APEC WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY FORUM

High-Level Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy (HLPDWE)

Ministerial Meeting

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I am HASHIMOTO Seiko, Minister for Gender Equality, Cabinet Office of Japan.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Madam Chair and the colleagues committed to organizing this forum today during this unprecedented crisis.

The COVID-19 has had a major and disproportionate impact on women and girls in Japan as well.

Today, I would like to talk about the three particularly critical impacts among them.

First impact is the increase and escalation of spousal and domestic violence, due to anxiety and stress during the stay-at-home period and temporary business closures. The number of counselling reported cases in May and June this year increased by 1.6 times compared to the same period last year. Japan has put special attention and taken measures. We have provided 24-hour-telephone counselling, counselling through Chat in social media and through e-mails in 10 foreign languages.

Second, loss of income and employment. Female workers face higher risk of layoffs and loss of livelihoods, because 56% of working women in Japan is non-regular workers and they are concentrated in the hardest-hit sectors, such as restaurants, tourism and hospitality sectors.

The number of women in employment decreased by 700,000 (seven hundred thousand) from March to April this year. It was almost twice as many as that of men. Also, the number of women giving up job searching increased by 680,000 (six hundred eighty thousand) which is about 2.5 times as many as that of men. The increase in single-parent families with economic difficulties is another issue of great concern.

To protect workers' employment, Japan has covered paid leave due to temporary closures with 140 US dollars at maximum per employee per day and expanded the recipients of the subsidy to non-regular workers in addition to regular workers. Also, we have provided benefits to self-employed workers. In addition, temporary special benefits of 470 US dollars per household are paid to low-income single-parent households. We are also working to create the favorable and enabling environment for pregnant women to take temporary absence from work and paid leave.

Third, the opportunity has brought about the penetration of online work and the possibilities of new working styles are expanding for both women and men. Flexible working arrangements such as working from home are also an opportunity to encourage men to participate in unpaid care work. Japan has introduced a subsidy to cover 50% of the initial cost to introduce tele-working system.

In July, the Government of Japan adopted “Intensive Policy to Accelerate the Empowerment of Women” which specifies such impacts, by the Headquarters for the Empowerment of Women, led by the Prime Minister. The “Intensive Policy” is so-called gender budgeting, to reflect efforts for gender equality and women’s empowerment in the budgeting process.

We have to aim to “build back stronger and better” for women's empowerment in the post-Pandemic, not just to recover to the same level before the pandemic.

It is crucial to grasp policy challenges through a gender lens, based on the research on differentiated gendered impacts.

The Cabinet Office has launched a new taskforce to analyze impacts and challenges on women and girls caused by the spread of the COVID-19. Under this taskforce, experts in various fields will discuss issues from a wide range of perspectives. By maximizing the function as the national machinery for gender equality and women’s empowerment, I will further reflect inputs from the taskforce to our policy.

This year is a “Beijing plus 25”, the landmark year for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

I will continue to make efforts in concert with the economies to realize gender equality and promote women’s empowerment in the Asia and the Pacific region.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.