

Section 4. Response to Globalization of Economy

1. Activities through WTO

As the global economy progresses and an active flow of people, goods, and capital across borders takes place, issues with the international economy are becoming more important to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has been making negotiations based on the “Doha Development Agenda” agreed upon at the 4th Ministerial Meeting in 2001 (Doha Round). The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is actively participating in WTO activities, such as negotiations of trade in services, taking into consideration its effects both on the vitalization of the economy and on Japan.

2. Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

Following the conclusion of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to complement trade liberalization within the multilateral trading system of WTO, bilateral economic partnership has further accelerated and expanded worldwide since the 1990s. At present agreements with Singapore, Mexico, Malaysia, Chile, and Thailand have already been put into effect and agreements with the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and ASEAN as a whole have also been signed. In addition, negotiations with several countries/regions including Vietnam and India are underway.

Negotiations with these countries mainly deal with issues such as the liberalization of trade in goods and investment. In the field of Health, Labour and Welfare issues such as liberalization of the trade in services and “movement of natural persons” are being dealt with. Especially in the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement that was signed in September 2006 and the Japan-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement that was signed in August 2007, Filipino/Indonesian candidates for nurses and certified care workers will be accepted to stay in Japan under certain conditions to acquire national qualification in Japan and work after that acquisition.

3. Other Economic Negotiations in the Fields of Health, Labour and Welfare

The Ministry is engaging in bilateral economic talks which involve issues such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and food. These include the “Regulatory Reform and Competition Policy Initiative” established under the “US-Japan Economic Partnership for Growth” announced at the Japan-US Summit meeting on June 2001, the “Japan-EU Regulatory Reform Dialog” that has been conducted since 1994, and the “Japan-China Economic Partnership Consultation” that started in 2002.

Column

Visits of Very Important Persons from Respective Countries

Cabinet ministers, administrators, and experts on health, social welfare, social security, and labour administration from respective countries visit the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to pay courtesies to the Minister, the Deputy Minister, and administrators within Health, Labour and Welfare and exchange opinions on policies with related bureaus and offices.

The photograph shows a conference between the Health, Labour, and Welfare Minister Masuzoe and OECD Secretary-General Gurría in December 2007. Opinions were freely exchanged at this conference on the main issues of the G8 Labour Ministers Meeting that was held in Japan in May 2008.

Many other conferences have been held, including conference with the Minister of Health Shokaya of the Republic of the Sudan, on the situation with medical care and medical policies in October 2007 and an exchange of opinions with the Labour and Social Policy Minister Maslarova on social security issues in January 2008.



Visit of OECD Secretary-General Gurría (3rd from the left) in 2007, the photograph shows the conference with the Health, Labour, and Welfare Minister Masuzoe (2nd from the right).