

Chapter 6

Promotion of Comprehensive Measures to Reverse the Birth Rate Decline in a Society with a Decreasing Population

Section 1. Promotion of Comprehensive Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation

The birth rate has declined sharply in Japan, and in 2005 the total fertility rate was the record low of 1.26. As the overall population has also been decreasing since 2004 a society with a decreasing population is becoming reality. Although the total fertility rate in 2007 increased by 0.02 points from the previous year to 1.34, an increase for 2 consecutive years, the number of births remains low at 1.09 million, a decrease of 3,000 from the previous year (number for 2007 is approximate). The “Population Projection for Japan: 2006-2055, December 2006” made by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research released at the end of 2006 revealed the stern prediction that in 2055, 50 years in the future, the population in Japan will drop below 90,000,000 if the current trends continues, the number of children born annually will drop below 0.5 million, which is less than half of that of today, and the aging rate will increase to beyond 40 % of the total population.

The government has been implementing comprehensive measures in accordance with “a concrete action plan for major policies based on the General Principles Concerning Measures for a Society with a Declining Birthrate” (the “Child and Childrearing Support Plan”) to include reviewing the self-sufficiency and work styles of young people and community-based childrearing support. Financial support for the prenatal, postnatal, and infancy periods was improved through an infancy premium being included in child allowances and by raising benefits for child care leave in FY 2007. Further efforts will be made in FY 2008 that include expanding community-based childrearing support centers, increasing the number of accepted children at day-care centers, improving day care services for sick children and family-type day care services, and promoting “after school plans for children” in all elementary school district.

However, the situation with the birth rate decline in Japan is that although many people wish to get married, give birth and raise children, and continue to work after marriage and having children, they cannot fulfil those wishes, which has resulted in the progress of the birth rate decline. Hence it is important to create an environment so that people in Japan can get married and give childbirth as they wish.

In consideration of this, the government established a study group on priority measures of a “Japan that Supports Children and their Families” which consists of related ministers and experts under the Council on Measures for a Society with a Decreasing Birth rate in February 2007. In

consideration of the sharp decline in the population of young people which will start in 2030 the study group discussed reconstruction and implementation of effective measures from various viewpoints which included reforming the system, policies, and consciousness. The priority strategy of a “Japan that Supports Children and their Families” (hereinafter referred to as the “Priority Strategy”) was compiled in December 2007 and decided upon at the Council on Measures for a Society with a Decreasing Birth rate the same month.

The Priority Strategy indicates that it is necessary to break the structure of having to choose between work and childbirth/childrearing. Hence it is necessary to implement the two measures of “realising a work-life balance through review of work styles” and “establishment of a comprehensive framework to support balancing work and childrearing and childrearing at home” together at the same time.

The government has been promoting measures for reviewing work styles in accordance with the Priority Strategy. In addition, discussions on creating a new framework to support the required expenses faced by society as a whole were being made at the Special Subcommittee on Measures to Reverse Birthrate Decline of the Social Security Council and the “Basic Concept of a New System to Support the Development of the Next-Generation” compiled in May 2008 aiming at largely improving childrearing support services including securing a day care service foundation so that all the people who are eager to work can do so by using these services and with childrearing support services being provided as necessary to anyone living anywhere. Based on this concept, concrete system design will promptly be carried out taking into consideration the trend with tax reforms. In addition, the “new zero wait listed children” was formulated to improve and strengthen measures for day care facilities in terms of both quality and quantity and measures will be promoted for 3 years starting in 2008 as a period of emphasis.

Furthermore, with regards to issues to be executed prior to establishing the new system given in the Basic Strategy, the Draft Law to Amend the Child Welfare Law was presented at a regular Diet session in 2008, which include establishing legal status of family-type day care services and childrearing support services under the Child Welfare Law, improving nursing care for abused children in family-type environments, and obligating enterprises with 101 workers or more to formulate general business operator action plans to support a good work-life balance. However, this draft law was discarded due to unfinished deliberations at the House of Councillors after being passed by the House of Representatives. This draft law is scheduled to be presented again at the next Diet session (see Figure 6-1-1).

Figure 6-1-1. Summary of the Draft Law to Amend the Child Welfare Law

[Purpose]

Making the required amendments for promotion of measures to support the development of the next-generation in communities and workplaces and taking into account the priority measures of a “Japan that Supports Children and their Families” includes establishing new childrearing support services incorporating family-type day care services, improved nursing care for abused children in family-type environments, and facilitating formulation of general business operator action plans.

[Key Contents]

I Promotion of Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation in Communities

- ① **Establishment of New Childrearing Support Services (Amendment of the Child Welfare Law)**
 - In order to promote day care services by diverse entities and expand childrearing support for all families while maintaining a certain level of quality, legal family-type day care services (nursery mothers), temporary day care services for all children, infant family home visit services (Hello Babies Services), nurturing support visit services, and community-based childrearing support center services will be established to promote implementation of services in municipalities.
- ② **Improved Support for Children and their Families facing Difficult Situations (Amendment of the Child Welfare Law)**
 - Review of the foster parent system in establishing a system of foster parentage without the intention of adoption (nurturing foster parent) and requiring certain training so that the foster parent system can be expanded to fill the position of social nursing care.
 - Providing care for abused children at foster parent’s homes (family home) to promote child nurturing in a family-type environment.
 - Establish the obligation to report improved measures that prevent abuse in children’s nursing homes and improve measures to prevent child abuse in communities.
- ③ **Establishing bases of childrearing support services (Amendment of the Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation)**
 - Review providing standards for the amount of day care services to be provided with consideration given to the formulation of action plans of municipalities for establishing bases for medium- and long-term childrearing support services taking into

II Promotion of Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation in Workplaces

- Promotion of Work-Family Balance Support (Amendment of the Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next-Generation)**
- Expanding the subject of obligation to formulate and submit general business operator action plans for improving employment environments to support a good work-family balance from enterprises with 301 workers or more to those of 101 workers or more.
 - Obligate business operators that are required to formulate and submit general business operator action plans to publish and disseminate the plans among workers.

(Date of Enforcement)

- In principle, will be enforced on April 1, 2009. (Review of formulation of action plans in ③ of I to be enforced on the day specified by a Cabinet Order within 6 months from the date of promulgation, the review of foster parent system in ② of I to be enforced on January 1, 2009, legal establishment of family-type day care services (nursery mothers) to be enforced on April 1, 2010, and expanding the subject enterprises of general business operator action plans of II to be enforced on April 1, 2011)