

Chapter 4.

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 2008 increased by 0.03 points from the previous year to 1.37, an increase for 3 consecutive years, and the number of births increased to nearly 1.091 million, an increase of 1,000 from the previous year (number for 2008 is approximate), both numbers remain low. 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. In FY 2008, priority measures have been taken for the urgent issues including promotion of community-based childrearing support by involving companies, expansion of the public cost-sharing of health checkups for pregnant women, and intensive provision of day-care centers. Further efforts will also be made in FY 2009 for priority measures such as expansion of community-based childrearing support centers and temporary day care services, increase in the number of accepted children at day-care centers, as well as expansion of support for single parent family and social

nursing care.

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 fulfill 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 “realizing 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 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. “The Primary Report of the Special Subcommittee on Measures to Reverse Birthrate Decline of the Social Security Council”, focusing on new system for day care service, was compiled in February 2009. This is an interim report that covers discussions on

design of new system in detail for the future. Efforts will be continuously made to make more concrete system taking into account the trend with fundamental reform of the tax system.

For the purpose of showing the way to fundamental reform of the tax system that enables to establish solid and sustainable social security system and to secure stable revenue sources, the “Medium-Term Program” for establishing a sustainable social security system with stable revenue sources’ was adopted by the Cabinet in December 2008.¹ The “Medium-Term Program” states that the efforts will be made to enhance function and efficiency of the measure for the birth rate decline such as through improving benefits and services of child-rearing support and that the contents of the program will be made more specific step-by-step after securing stable revenue sources for the costs required for establishing the system.

Furthermore, with regards to issues to be executed prior to establishing the new system given in the Basic Strategy, the Draft Act to Amend the Child Welfare Act was approved in December 2008 and most of revised regulations were put into effect on April 2009 (see Figure 4-1-1). The draft law includes establishing legal status of family-type day care services and childrearing support services under the Child Welfare Act, 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.

¹ “The Mid-Term Program” was partly revised on June 23, 2009.

Figure 4-1-1 Summary of the Draft Law to Amend the Child Welfare Act

[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 Act)

- 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 Act)

- 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)

Section 2. Promotion of Measures for Community-Based Childrearing Support

As community functions are being lost due to the progress of birth rate decline, such as the orientation toward nuclear families, and changing local communities, the burden of childrearing is increasing with a feeling of being isolated with no advisers in local communities present. Especially among females with children aged 3 or younger, 80% of such children are being cared for at home, resulting in many having feelings of being isolated and alienated.

In order that childrearing parents and their children can easily get together at a familiar place and ask for advice and interact with each other, establishment of community-based childrearing support centers was promoted in FY 2007 by reorganizing conventional Get Together Squares and community-based childrearing support centers and utilizing children's halls.

Aside from quantitative improvements, expanding grassroots childrearing support activities is also important to develop mutual support and learn childrearing at childrearing support bases in such communities. Based on such an understanding, the "National Federation of Get Together Squares" was established in April 2004 (a specified nonprofit corporation "National Federation of Childrearing Squares" from April 2007) as a nationwide organization involving people working for Get Together Squares. The federation has also been conducting various seminars and training.

Community-based childrearing support functions are being improved through such service programs as family support centers (community-based membership organizations comprising people who are eager to provide support and those who are eager to receive support) engaged in mutual assistance activities such as pick-up and drop-off as well as after-school care for children to meet irregular and varied day care needs due to unexpected overtime work or other reasons, short-term childrearing support services to look after children in such cases as overtime work, business trips, or sickness of their parents, and a home visitation program to support childcare by visiting families to provide consultation, guidance, and advice on childrearing.

In addition, acceptance of operating entities and placement of staff has become more flexible at temporary/emergency day care services to eliminate the

psychological distress of guardians due to sickness/injuries or the burden of childrearing since FY 2007, and a pilot program of temporary day care services implemented to provide highly accessible easy to use services.

Furthermore, “home visit services for all families with infants (Hello Babies Services)” has been implemented to provide information on childrearing support, to identify appropriate rearing environment, and to provide consultation services.

Section 3. Improving Measures for Children in Need of Care including Measures to Prevent Child Abuse

1. Situation of child abuse

With regard to measures to prevent child abuse, the “Act for Prevention of Child Abuse” (hereinafter referred to as the “Child Abuse Prevention Act”) was enforced in November 2000. In FY 2004, the Child Abuse Prevention Act and the Child Welfare Act were revised to improve the system. However, serious child abuse cases involving children being killed show no sign of decline, and the number of consultations on child abuse at child guidance centers across the nation continue to grow. In FY 2007, the number of consultation reached 40,639, which is 3.5 times larger than that of the period just before enforcement of the Child Abuse Prevention Act. Hence child abuse is an important issue to be worked immediately on by our entire society.

2. State of Measures to Prevent Child Abuse

Child abuse seriously effects children’s mental and physical development as well as personality formulation. Therefore, a comprehensive and seamless support system to prevent child abuse is necessary which covers “prevention”, “early detection/response”, and provides “protection/self-sufficiency support” for abused children.

The following measures have been implemented to cope with this issue:

a) Measures for prevention include promotion of the “home visit program for all families with infants (the former “home visit services for all families with infants 4 months after childbirth)” to provide information on childrearing support, to identify appropriate rearing environment, and to provide consultation services; promotion of the “home visit program to support rearing (the former “home visit program to support childrearing)” to visit families that are in need of rearing support to provide assistance with childrearing; and establishment of community-based childrearing support centers where childrearing parents can ask for advice and exchange

information.

b) Measures for early detection/response include promoting the establishment and expanded functions of municipal networks for protecting children (Council of Prevention Measures for Child Abuse), strengthening the system of child guidance centers including improved placement of child welfare officers, promotion of support for parents for reunification of families and restoring/improving families' childrearing functions as recurrence prevention measures for parents who have abused children.

c) Measures for "protection/self-sufficiency support" include promotion of small-size care such as children's nursing homes, improvement of the quality and quantity of care staff, including placement of individually assigned staffs and family social workers, promotion of foster careers, and programs for securing personal guarantors.

3. Child Abuse Preventive Measures through Revising the Child Welfare Act and Expansion of the Social Nursing Care System

The Child Abuse Prevention Act and the Child Welfare Act were revised in 2007 and enforced in April 2008. In November 2008, the "Draft Act to Amend the Child Welfare Act" was approved, which takes measures such as establishing new childrearing support services, and improving nursing care for abused children in family-type environments. With regard to the measures for children in need of care, followings were incorporated in the revised law and were enforced on April 1, 2009:

- a) Making childrearing support services statutory such as "infant family home visit services (Hello Babies Services)", "nurturing support visit services", and "community-based childrearing support center services";
- b) Expanding functions of municipal networks for protecting children (the Council of Prevention Measures for Child Abuse);
- c) Review of the foster parent system through making distinction between foster parents with the intention of adoption and nurturing foster parents, and also through making designated training mandatory to meet the requirements to become nurturing foster parents;
- d) Providing care for abused children at foster parent's homes (family home);

- e) Review of children's self-reliant living assistance services such as through providing services in accordance with application for use by eligible persons, and making persons aged younger than 20 eligible for the service along with children who have finished compulsory education; and
- f) Establishing the rules to prevent abuse in children's nursing homes including making mandatory report of abuse in children's nursing homes, as well as creating measures to be taken by prefectures and the child welfare councils in prefectures when reports are made.

The report compiled by the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Nursing Care in Children's Division of the Social Security Council in November 2007 states as follows: "There is a need to review the current types of facilities in order to provide appropriate care in accordance with the situation and ages of children, and to discuss criteria for personnel placement and basis for calculating expenses for welfare placement. In order to conduct such review, however, it is critical to secure necessary revenue sources. In addition, investigation and analysis of the current situation of care services need to be done." In consideration of this report, a fact-finding survey is being implemented. Incorporating the result of the survey, discussion will be held to make more specific measures.

4. Public Enlightenment Efforts to Prevent Child Abuse

Every November has been designated as "child abuse prevention promotion month" since 2004 to raise public interest in the child abuse problem. During this period, intensive public enlightenment activities are implemented in cooperation with related ministries and agencies as well as local governments and related organizations. In FY 2008, public enlightenments activities included inviting public contributions of a monthly slogan and its selection, holding nationwide forums (November 2 to 3 in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture), creating and distributing public enlightenment posters and fliers, and utilizing government publicity through various media (televisions, news papers, and magazines). In addition, support is being provided for the "orange ribbon campaign" implemented mainly by a private organization (National Network of Child Abuse Prevention) with the aim of facilitating enlightenment efforts on child

abuse prevention.

5. Current Situation with Spousal Violence

Spousal violence is a serious infringement of human rights and also a grave social problem. In FY 2007, 77,467 women (75,377 women in FY 2006) visited women's consulting offices and female consultants across the nation, of which 23,758 women (22,315 women in FY 2006) reported spousal violence.² Spousal violence accounts for 30.7% (29.6% in FY 2006) of the reasons they sought consultations. As the number of victims of spousal violence is increasing, the government needs to accelerate measures to address the issue.

² actual number of people visited women's consulting offices for counseling.

6. State of Measures against Spousal Violence

A range of consultations and protection measures are being taken to improve the support system for victims of spousal violence and include a) providing a telephone consultation service on holidays and during night time at women's consulting offices and establishing networks among related organizations, b) providing specialized training for consulting staff at women's consulting offices, c) placing specialized psychotherapy staff and providing night guards at temporary protection centers of women's consulting offices, d) programs for securing personal guarantors, and e) expanding function of legislative action program.

In FY 2009, the unit price of temporary protection for infants was newly created as one of the commissions on temporary protection services for victims at women's consulting offices in order to improve care. In addition, instructors will be placed at women's protection facility to improve care for accompanying children, and training

will be implemented to nurture specialized interpreters to support foreign victims.

7. Revision of the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims

The “Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims” was to be reviewed 3 years after the enforcement as necessary in accordance with Article 3 of the supplementary provisions included in the revision of 2004. In consideration of this, the “Act to Amend the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims” introduced by a Diet member was approved on July 5, 2007, and enforced on January 11, 2008.

Summary of the amendment is as follows:

- (1) Obligating municipalities to make the effort to formulate basic plans and establish Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers
- (2) Enhancement of the protection order system
 - a) Protection order for victims facing threats to their lives
 - b) Protection order to prohibit telephone calls
 - c) Protection order to prohibit approaching relatives of the victims etc.
- (3) Notification from the relevant court to Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers on issuing protection orders

Section 4. Promotion of Measures for Self-Sufficiency Support of Single Parent Families

With regards to measures for single parent families, the “Act for the Welfare of Mothers with Dependents and Widows” was amended in 2002. In addition, comprehensive measures for self-sufficiency support have been implemented that include a) support measures for childrearing and living, b) employment support measures, c) measures to secure childrearing expenses, and d) financial support measures.

Furthermore, based on the “Policy Package to Address the Economic Crisis” (formulated by a Joint Meeting of the Government and Ruling Parties Council to Address the Economic Crisis), the supplementary budget were allocated for the efforts to further improve measures for self-sufficiency support of single parent families, etc. by taking measures that include: increasing the amount of allowance and extending the period until the end of FY 2011 to provide allowance for advanced skill training promotion payment programs to support acquisition of qualification which is effective in promoting economic independence of nurses, etc.; providing baby sitting service while taking vocational training; providing support for home-based employment, lowering the loan rate and relaxation of loan conditions for welfare mothers with dependents and widow loan.

“Vocational training with preparatory seminar” has been implemented as preparatory stage to promote vocational independence for mothers of single families with no or insufficient working experiences, and those who still have a difficulty in finding jobs only with the “self-sufficiency support program” provided by local governments such as recipients of the Child Rearing Allowance and those receiving public.

Section 5. Improving Measures for Maternal and Child Health

1. Promotion of “Healthy and Happy Family 21”

The “Healthy and Happy Family 21” Committee has conducted interim evaluations of the “Healthy and Happy Family 21 (Sukoyaka Family 21)”, a national campaign for the 21st century in the field of maternal and child health, in the intermediate of FY 2005 and indicated the future direction of implementing priority measures by taking into consideration the achievements of the last 5 years. In addition, the “Child and Childrearing Support Plan” which formulated in December 2004 included measures and goals with consideration given to the purposes of the “Healthy and Happy Family 21”. In 2009, the committee for “Healthy and Happy Family 21” is to conduct the second interim evaluations and further efforts will be made in the future to implement measures more actively.

2. Support for Children’s Mental Health

A “Study Team to Nurture Doctors Specialized in Children’s Mental Health” has been held for 2 years since 2005 to discuss how to nurture pediatricians and psychiatrists who are capable of coping with various problems with children’s mental health, child abuse, and developmental disorders. A report was compiled by the study group on March 2007. Taking this report into consideration, training has been conducted and text books were prepared in FY 2007 for promoting clinical doctors for children’s mental health. In FY 2008, human resources development and technical support have been implemented through the project to establish a support system that puts core hospitals in prefectures at the center and maintains collaboration with each medical institution and health and welfare institution, and through provision of core hospitals.

3. Improvement of Health Checkups for Pregnant Women

With an increasing number of women bearing children at later age in recent years,

the pregnant women in higher need of health management have been growing. At the same time, some pregnant women do not receive health checkups due to the economic reasons. Accordingly, the importance and necessity for health checkup for pregnant women have been enhanced in order to secure health of mother and fetus. In consideration of this situation, efforts have been made to make improvements by encouraging local governments to expand the public cost-sharing.

Furthermore, in the FY 2008 second supplementary budget, measures were taken to improve health checkups and to reduce economic burden on pregnant women by covering 9 checkups with public fund until FY 2010, which were no fiscal support in the past, to ensure that pregnant women receive all necessary checkups (about 14 times). (National average of the number of checkups covered by public fund was 13.96 times as of April 2009.)

In addition, promotional efforts are being made through government publicity and leaflets to facilitate pregnant women properly receiving health checkups and early registration (hence the early issue of a maternal and child health handbook).

4. Maternity Marks

Maternity marks are provided to facilitate public consideration for pregnant women. Since effective and efficient way to utilize these marks are to hand them out with maternal and child health handbooks to pregnant women, measures have been taken using local finance budget from FY 2007 so that active efforts will be made in distributing the maternity marks with maternal and child health handbooks.

In addition, since FY 2008, a survey has been conducted to investigate the efforts made by local governments related to maternity marks. The number of municipalities to create, purchase, and distribute personal goods with maternity marks for pregnant women as a municipal projects increased from 199 (10.9%) in FY 2006 to 581 (32.1%) in FY 2007, and 746 (41.2%) in FY 2008 (as of the end of August 2008).

5. Formulation of Guidelines for Creating and Utilizing Human Fertilized Embryos

In July 2004, the Council for Science and Technology Policy compiled a report on the “Basic Concept of Handling Human Fertilized Embryo”. Based on the report, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, in cooperation with other related ministries including the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, has been holding a Special Committee on Human Fertilized Embryo under the Science and Technology Committee of the Health Sciences Council. In April 2009, a report on “Creation and Use of Human Fertilized Embryo for the Purpose of Research on Assisted Reproductive Technology” was compiled. In consideration of this report, discussion has been held on establishing the guideline for research on assisted reproductive technology that includes creation of human fertilized embryo.

6. Support for Fertilization Treatment

As external fertilization and intracytoplasmic sperm injection impose a substantial financial burden, efforts are have been made to reduce that financial burden through subsidizing part of the expenses required for sterilization treatment among spouses as part of support for development of the next-generation since FY 2004.

2007 the number of times to provide the benefit has been expanded (maximum amount of 100,000 yen per treatment, no more than twice a year) and the limit on income was relaxed (to total couple income of 7.3 million yen).

Furthermore, in the FY 2009 supplementary budget, the amount of the benefits increased (from 100,000 yen to 150,000 yen), and the costs for enlightening and publicity activities related to fertilization treatment were also included in the budget.