

Highlights Japan

Babies and Bosses – Policies towards reconciling work and family life

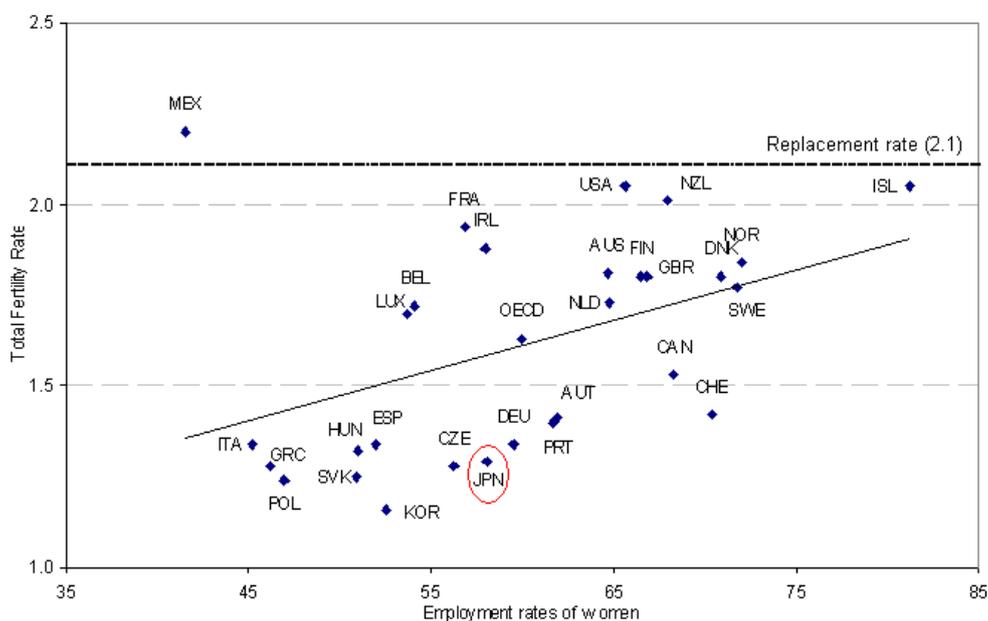
www.oecd.org/els/social/family

- *Parents in Japan find it hard to combine work and family commitments. The result is a low female employment and a very low fertility rate of below 1.3 children per woman.*
- *Social policies to help parents (leave arrangements, childcare, etc) are relatively well-developed. The real problem is in the labour market, which discriminates against women. For example, the gender wage gap is twice the OECD average.*
- *Japanese workplaces should ensure that women have access to regular employment and career track systems in the same way that men do. Pay systems in Japan should have a greater role for performance-related pay, so that mothers are no longer punished for taking time-off from work. Regular employees should also have access to flexible working hours and part-time employment opportunities. Workplaces need to give mothers more opportunities to return to regular employment.*

Fertility Rates and female employment

From 1970 to 2005 the Total Fertility Rate has fallen from 2.1 children per woman to just below 1.3. This fertility rate is low compared to other countries with similar levels of female employment. For example, the female employment rate was close to 59 % in 2006, while it was just above 57% in France. This suggests that many Japanese parents have great difficulty combining work with family commitments.

Figure 1: Countries with high female employment rates also have relatively high fertility rates
Total fertility rate and female employment rate, 2005



Gender pay gap

The labour market position of women is unfavourable. For example in Japan the gender pay gap is large and women's median income is two thirds of that received by their male counterparts (twice the OECD average). The gender pay differences are related to two-thirds of the non-regular employees being female,

a lack of women in supervisory roles (under 10% compared to around a third in the UK, Austria, Canada and Ireland), and women being underrepresented in management track career positions ('sougou-shoku'), where females make up a meagre 3.5%. Given these conditions, it is no surprise that women think twice about having children and leaving regular employment. Moreover, when women decide to have children they will avoid returning to a low paid job if family income allows it. Workplace practices have to change to make it more attractive for 'mother returners' to resume their labour force participation.

Figure 2: The gender wage gap in Japan is almost twice that of the OECD average

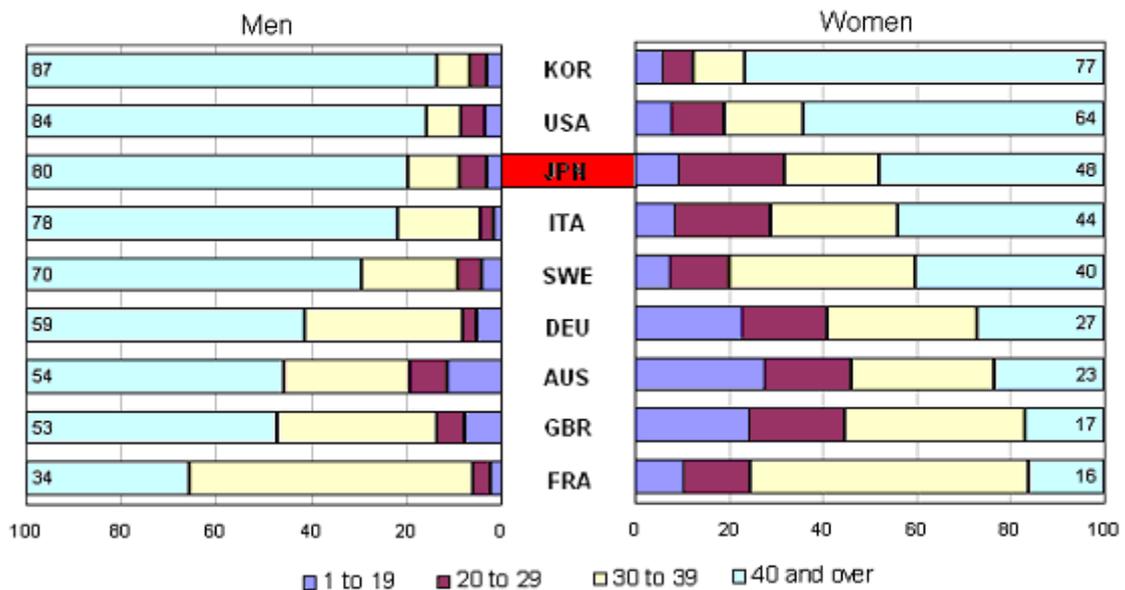


Japanese men and women work long hours

Long working hours make it difficult for both parents to combine work with care commitments. In Japan, only one in five male employees works less than 40 hours, and only around one in two female employees do the same. Long working hours mean that mothers are responsible for the majority care of children, as fathers' contributions to childcare are limited.

Figure 3: Japanese, American and Korean employees have longer working hours than their European counterparts

Share of workers by distribution of usual weekly hours of work, by gender, percentages adding to 100%, in 2005



Source: OECD Family database (2007)