

## **WAW ! High-Level Panel Discussion 4 “Future of Family: Getting Support, Utilizing and Sharing”**

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### **Background and Issues**

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Due to changes in the structure of society, family form is changing dramatically in recent years. In Japan, families consisting of a working father and a stay-at-home mother with two children have been recognized "standard households", but now it represents only 4.6% of the total households. Japan's family unit has become more diverse<sup>1</sup>. Single member households not in employment account for a large proportion followed by aged-person households and dual-income households. When looking at the world, while some countries approve more diverse forms of family such as same-sex marriage or unmarried couples/common-law partners who don't choose legal marriage, and others face population growth problems, HIV / AIDS, family separation due to conflict and labor migration.

As the family form changes, the situation in which women are responsible for most of unpaid housework and care work still remains an issue. In other countries, like France, of which birth rates maintains increase while more women have jobs because government adjust social system to support women economically as well as men share responsibilities for child rearing and housework to reduce women's physical and physiological burden. In Japan, men's participation in housework and care work is increasing but their spending time is far from that of women<sup>2</sup>. At the “WAW! 2017,” it was pointed out that ICT usage makes men easier to participate in unpaid work and it was emphasized that the importance of changing perception of rigid gender roles, as well as re-recognizing the economic value of unpaid work and reducing long working hours.

One of the targets of Goal 5 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to recognize and evaluate unpaid housework, caregiving and care work by providing public services, infrastructure and social security, as well as sharing responsibilities within households and families, giving condition to the circumstances of each country. G7 Summit at Taormina in 2017 released “G7 Roadmap for Gender-Responsive Economic Environment” in which G7 decided to promote the fair distribution of care responsibilities between women and men by 2020. In the “Charlevoix-commitment to equality and economic growth” released at the G7 Charlevoix Summit in 2018, it was announced that we would support gender equality in the distribution of unpaid care work. In the leaders' declaration issued at the G20 summit aims in the same year, it was agreed to work with the private sector to improve access to quality and affordable care infrastructure and parental leave

Under labor reform laws, which will be enforced sequentially in April in Japan, the companies are compelled to set the upper limit of overtime hours and the obligation to give paid holidays of at least 5 days a year. It is important that how to reallocate men's reduced working hours to housework and childcare. Today anxiety about educational expenses for children in the future is one of the reasons for declining birthrate in Japan, along with the burden of child rearing that women are currently considered most responsible for. From October 2019, most part of early childhood education over 3 years old will be free of charge. Also from April 2020, higher education will be free for economically disadvantaged children, and students will be provided with scholarships to cover living expenses and other costs with no repayment required.

The number of female employment has increased by 2.88 million in the past 6 years. More women continue to work after giving birth. On the other hand, it has been a serious issue that poverty of elderly women due to non-pension or low rate pension is spreading. This has been caused by low wages during working period or taking a break from work due to child rearing or nursing care, which affects the total amount of pension.

While everyone is born as a dependent presence and becomes a dependency after age, there is a need for a society in which people share necessary unpaid care work without depending deeply on just one particular person's shoulder. This issue is closely related to SDGs goal 1 (no poverty), goal 5 (gender equality), goal 10 (reduce inequality).

## Topics

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- As the family form changes, how we can recognize, reduce and ideally share unpaid housework such as child care, household chores and care work which exist within both family and society?
- What measures are necessary to promote understanding of diverse family forms?
- What is the strategy to accelerate participation of men in housework and care work?
- As the family diversifies, what is a new approach to balance between work and family better? What are the good practices in other countries?
- What is a desirable social support to diverse forms of family such as single parent, common-law marriage and same-sex marriage?
- What is a desirable social support to single member household, especially single aged-person household? What is the strategy to reduce poverty, especially for elderly women?

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1 Shungo Koreeda, Daiwa Institute of Research (2018). "Standard Household" represents fewer than 5%". Retrieved from [https://www.dir.co.jp/report/column/20180710\\_010074.html](https://www.dir.co.jp/report/column/20180710_010074.html)

2 For example, the weekly average hours per day on household/child rearing chores for men with children under the age of 6 has increased from 67 minutes in 2011 to 83 minutes as of 2016, but it is less than 20% compared to women (461 minutes in 2011, 454 minutes in 2016).