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# Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling

Japan market  
overview



By Royal Charter



**In Japan, workforce participation by women is lower than many western countries, sitting at 54% compared with 71.3% of the male population<sup>1</sup>. The section below explores how women in Japan are experiencing the Second Glass Ceiling and looks at which factors are more influential.**

With fewer than 15% of senior and management positions held by women in Japan, and ranking at 116th on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index<sup>2</sup>, the cultural norm is an obstacle Japanese women face in the workplace. While the view in Japan can be that women are less motivated to seek promotion, a key challenge can be seen to be the difficulty of balancing work with family obligations. In fact, it has been raised that promoting gender awareness and diversity is critical to the growth of the Japanese economy<sup>3</sup>.

Many Japanese women retire from their jobs upon marriage<sup>4</sup>, and gender inequality is an issue in Japan regardless of the age of the woman. This means cultural change will only occur if it is tackled at all levels, not just relating to the SGC. However, the conversation surrounding the SGC could have an important impact on organizations, encouraging a shift in the way in which they employ and perceive women workers.



## Key findings

### More progress needed for Japanese women in the workplace

Less than half (44%) of Japanese women surveyed are confident their generation will receive the same levels of flexibility and support to stay in the workforce as long as their male colleagues. This is the lowest of the five countries polled and compares with an average of 59% across the five.

Just over two-fifths of Japanese women (42%) agree it is uncommon to see women in positions of leadership, matching the average across the five countries.

### Role models are considered important

More than six in ten Japanese women (62%) believe the presence of more experienced female colleagues would be beneficial to the development of younger women in the workplace. Though this represents a strong majority view, it is below the average of 73% across the five countries polled.

### Women encounter barriers to staying in work

Just over a quarter of Japanese women polled (26%) cited caring responsibilities (for parents or children) as a barrier to remaining in the workplace (slightly below the average of 29% across all countries). Only 8% of Japanese women agree there are no barriers at all to staying in work (10% globally).

### Menopause

Nearly one in five Japanese women (19%) mentioned health or well-being considerations for menopause as a barrier to continuing work (marginally below the five-country average of 21%).

More than half (55%) of Japanese women believe it would be difficult to raise issues related to menstruation, difficult pregnancies, and miscarriage with an employer (slightly below the five-country average of 58%).

There is a marked difference depending on the gender of the manager, with 65% in Japan uncomfortable to raise these issues with a male manager (52% across all countries), and 34% saying they would be uncomfortable talking to a female manager (18% globally).

### Formal policies would help

Well over half of women polled in Japan (55%) believe it is helpful for organizations to have formal policies to address personal health and wellbeing issues such as menopause, health issues related to menstruation, difficult pregnancies or miscarriage, but only 5% say they are aware of such policies in their organization.

[Read the full Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling report and see the recommendations here](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Gender Statistics](#), The World Bank, accessed June 2023

<sup>2</sup> [Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#), World Economic Forum, July 2022

<sup>3</sup> [Mobilizing women to step up as leaders in Japan](#), McKinsey, April 2021

<sup>4</sup> [Japanese Women Split Over Quitting Job if Husband Earns Enough](#), Nippon, July 2021

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