

Japan slides to 111th in WEF gender equality rankings

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Japan's efforts to bridge the gender divide have failed to translate into substantial change, with the nation sliding to 111th in a global inequality ranking report released Wednesday.

The Global Gender Gap Report 2016, an annual benchmarking exercise by the World Economic Forum (WEF), found that despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's push for women to play a greater role in society, the nation had done little to make more use of its female talent since its ranking at 101st last year.

Contributing most to the drop, the WEF said, was the gender gap for professional and technical workers, with Japan ranking 118th for economic participation and opportunity — down from 106th last year.

However, it had made progress in reducing the gender gap in areas such as tertiary education enrolment and women's representation among lawmakers, senior officials and managers, and in improving wage equality for similar work, the WEF said.

Japan also ranked higher this year in the key areas of education attainment and health and survival.

Regionally, the report, which ranks 144 countries, showed that East Asia and the Pacific has closed 68 percent of its gender gap.

But the WEF said the region contains stark contrasts, with a large distance between the most gender-equal societies such as the Philippines (7), which ranked highest among Asian nations, and New Zealand (9), and economic heavyweights China (99), Japan and South Korea (116).

“The sluggish pace of change in these larger nations in part explains why

current projections suggest the region will not close its economic gap for another 111 years,” the WEF said.

The organization, based in Geneva, Switzerland, said on a global scale a slowdown in progress meant economic parity between the sexes could take 170 years, noting chronic imbalances in salaries and workforce participation despite women attending university in equal or higher numbers than men in 95 countries.

Nordic nations, meanwhile, remain the world’s most gender-equal societies, led by Iceland (1), Finland (2), Norway (3) and Sweden (4).

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said that while the overall ranking went down, individual areas such as education, health care and political participation improved.

“The government is promoting female power as the biggest potential driver for economic growth,” he said. “Under the government of Abe, about 1 million jobs have been created for women, and the number of female board members of companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange has more than doubled.

“We will keep continuing with these efforts,” he added.