

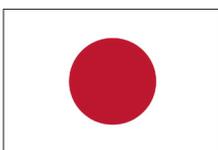
Japan



Students joining the campaign for SDG 4 at an upper secondary school and showing their messages to the MPs

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2021

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



Population:	126.17 million in 2019 (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2020)
2020 Global Index Score:	79.85/100 (SDR 2021)
2020 Global Index Rank:	18/165 (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Dashboard:	● SDG achieved (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Trend:	↑ On track or maintaining SDG achievement (SDR 2021)
SDG 10 Dashboard:	● Significant challenges remain (SDR 2021)
2019 HDI Value/Rank:	0.919, 19 out of 189 (HDRO, 2020)
GINI Index:	0.3721 (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labor, 2019)
GNI per capita (PPP\$):	42,932 (HDRO, 2020)
Income Group:	High-Income Status (WB, 2020)
Education Expenditure:	3.2% of GDP, 8.4% of the total budget (2017)

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COUNTRY AND EDUCATION CONTEXT

Japan has the world's third-largest economy and based on the government's Statistical Handbook for 2020, its total population in 2019 was 126.17 million and is ranked 11th among countries or areas with a population of 10 million or more. It is an island country situated off the eastern seaboard of the Eurasian continent in the northern hemisphere and is particularly prone to various geological phenomena.

The devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused nationwide school closures in Japan that began on 2 March 2020. In response to this educational crisis, the government, with the aid of a supplemental budget, provided computers to all students at the primary and lower secondary levels to promote distance learning. Although most schools reopened and became almost fully operational by the end of June 2020, notable impacts on the educational system were observed, including delays in lesson delivery, challenges in adapting to online learning platforms, which became an additional burden for the educators. They also have to maintain daily monitoring of children's temperature, sanitise classroom furniture and equipment, manage physical distancing, and accomplish other tasks as mandated by the health and safety protocols in the country.

The number of teachers in Japan is considered as one of the lowest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries; therefore, the government must significantly increase the number of teachers by augmenting its education budget.

Foreign children, migrants, and illiterate adults (SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.6)

One in every six (constituting 16%) primary and lower secondary level children cannot go to school, and only 40-60 per cent among children with foreign roots attend upper secondary school whereas net enrolment of upper secondary education for this age group is 99 per cent in 2017.¹ While school fees for upper secondary education are free of charge, this measure is not applied to Korean schools in Japan, a practice by the government that could be considered a form of ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, migrant workers in Japan struggle to read and write using the Japanese language. Only 34 public evening schools offering lower secondary education have been established in 10 out of 46 prefectures of Japan.² These existing realities demonstrate the gaps in improving both youth and adult literacy and providing quality education to all migrants in Japan.

The last survey on Japan's literacy rate was conducted in 1948 and has not been updated ever since, hence, the lack of data. However, a media report reflects that there is a significant number of youth and adult illiterates in Japan, not only among migrants but also among the Japanese.

1 From https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1421568_001.pdf

2 From https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/yakan/index.htm



Students joining the campaign at upper secondary school

The Ministry of Education conducted the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC), initiated by the OECD in 2011-2012, which includes reading skills. Unfortunately, the illiterates and those with intellectual disabilities were regarded as ‘missing value’, which leaves them behind.

Education financing (SDG Targets 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5)

Japan’s public education spending ratio compared to the GDP in 2017 was at 3.18 per cent (lower than the OECD average that was 3.5% of GDP in 2017), and 8.4 per cent of the total government expenditure, compared to 10.8 per cent on average across OECD countries, thus imposing on households to pay for education. This further aggravates the already existing disparities in education between the rich and the poor in the country. The low education budget is the main reason for the high student-to-teacher ratio- 32 students per teacher at lower secondary levels, compared to 23 students on average across OECD countries. Japanese teachers work 1,883 hours a year, 200 hours more than the OECD average. Between 2005 and 2019, primary and secondary teachers’ statutory salaries in Japan fell by 8 per cent because of the insufficient budget for education, while these increased by 5-7 per cent on average across OECD countries.

Quality of education (SDG Targets 4.1 and 4.a)

The overall quality of education is driven by various factors including the school environment, educational approach and methodologies, pervasive incidence of bullying in schools, distress experienced at home, and other reasons that impact students’ motivation to learn and continue education.

The number of students who refused to go to school was at 231,000 in 2019, which is the highest recorded ever.³ The reasons for children’s refusal to go to school vary from child to child but they may be caused by any or combination of the following: a dislike of the school atmosphere and rules; unpleasant relationship with one’s friends or schoolmates, including bullying; distressing experience with teachers; being frustrated with studying for exams and with the teacher-centred and rote-learning teaching approach; juvenile delinquency; dependency on one’s parents; and overall anxiety about the future.

There have also been reports on corporal punishments, sexual harassment, and violence against girls committed by teachers. It is troubling to note that 282 teachers have been punished or terminated due to cases of sexual harassment or violence in 2018. Although a milestone has been reached with the passing of an Act that prohibits the re-issuance of the teaching license to former teachers who have been terminated due to sexual violence and harassment, considering the profound physical and psychological damages inflicted to the victims, stronger measures should be taken to stop violence against girls in schools.

The number of bullying cases in schools accounted for 610,000 cases in 2019. The increasing number of cases of bullying and children’s refusal to go to school impact the quality of school education in Japan, which is deeply problematic. Students seem tired and disinterested due to the use of a teacher-centred and knowledge transfer-oriented approach through rote learning, stemming from the high pressure to pass entrance exams to get admitted to better secondary schools and universities.

3 From https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20201015-mext_jidou02-100002753_01.pdf

Children's participation in decision-making processes of education and school policy (SDG Target 4.1)

Some schools' efforts to improve school rules and regulations after consultation with students are commendable. However, children's participation in school governance is yet to be institutionalised. The School Management Consultation Committee only consists of teachers and representatives of parents and the community, excluding students. At the municipality level, opportunities for children to express their views on education policy and governance are very limited. At the central level, there is no student representation in any consultation committees on the formulation of education policy. The lack of participation in the decision-making process in school governance is considered to be one of the reasons for not being able to address the continuing increase of cases of bullying in schools and children's refusal to go to school.

Students with disabilities (SDG Target 4.5)

Although Japan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2014, barriers to access to education of students with disabilities remain, thereby leaving them to go to special education schools. These include large class sizes, insufficient barrier-free school environments, and a lack of trained teachers and support systems to cater to the needs of students with disabilities.

Gender disparity (SDG Targets 4.5 and 4.6)

Gender disparities persist in the country. Boys' enrolment to university is at 56.3 per cent whereas, girls' enrolment is at 50.1 per cent.⁴ In addition, a majority (62%) of girls have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment and discrimination in their daily life.⁵

Disaggregated data collection (SDG Target 4.5)

The current Japanese data collection system for SDG 4.5 only includes a gender dimension focused on gender disparity.

Current data on adults' participation rate in learning

4 From https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/toukei/chousa01/kihon/kekka/k_detail/1407849.htm

5 From https://www.girlscout.or.jp/activities/project/research/pdf/gsj_genderrep2019_200220.pdf

opportunities should be disaggregated by disability, ethnicity, and immigrant status, among others, to help ensure that no adult is left behind in realising the right to education.

Education for Sustainable Development in non-formal education and for adults (SDG Target 4.7)

The inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the country's school curriculum from primary to upper secondary education is admirable. However, adult and community education was neglected. An additional issue is that the indicators to capture the progress of SDG Target 4.7 have not been set yet, leading to failure in data collection. The MoE should set up indicators and data collection methods through consultations with civil society organisations (CSOs).

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Aid volume to basic education (SDG Targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, and 4.6)

Japan's aid for basic education amounted to US\$190 million, which accounts for only 1.4 per cent of Japanese total ODA disbursement in 2018, whereas the average percentage of OECD/DAC member states was 3.4 per cent. This is due to the following reasons: First, Japanese aid prioritises economic infrastructure for which 39.9 per cent of Japanese aid is spent, while only 8.5 per cent in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average. Second, Japanese education aid prioritises higher education, including scholarships to study at universities in Japan, for which 52 per cent of Japan's aid to education is spent.⁶

Contribution to GPE and ECW (SDG Targets 4.1, 4.2, 4.5, and 4.6)

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for Japan to formulate and implement bilateral aid that involves travels of Japanese experts and consultants and the invitation of foreign trainees to the country. To contribute to SDG Target 4.1 in light of the pandemic, Japan should contribute more to multilateral organisations, such as the Global Partnership for Education

6 OECD CRS system, From <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1>

ROLE OF KOMINKAN IN THE COVID-19 ERA

There are 14,281 Kominkan or Community Learning Centres (CLCs) throughout Japan that provide learning opportunities for youth, adults, and senior citizens based on their learning needs. While the Kominkan is commendable for its efforts in responding to various learning needs, the learning programme consists of 38 per cent on hobby and culture, 17 per cent on home economics, such as cooking and tailoring, and only 7 per cent on citizenship education.

Given Kominkan's importance in the country's education system, the following recommendations need to be considered by the government:

1. To respond to the learning needs of migrants as well as those who are illiterate, considering the limited number

- of evening classes in lower secondary schools for them.
2. To provide an equivalency programme to those who could not finish primary or lower secondary education. The provision of this programme is common in CLCs in many Asian countries.
3. To increase the number of learning programmes on global citizenship to foster rights and responsibilities among youth and adults, especially the poor, migrants, and refugees, and on disaster preparedness and resilience, especially in light of the impact of COVID-19.
4. The Kominkan staff need capacity building in order to organise the community and strengthen linkages among stakeholders to identify and solve challenges and issues faced by the community.



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(GPE), which supports national education systems driven by the education ministry in coordination with donors and CSOs at the country level, and the Education Cannot Wait (ECW), which supports education in emergencies and in crises. Japan's current contribution to GPE is US\$ 7.5 million a year, while no contribution has been made to ECW.

Key Messages and Recommendations

1. Align the 'Inclusive Education System,' as defined by the MoE, with the UN CRPD, and improve the laws and policies in the country to ensure genuine inclusive education for all learners with disabilities.
2. Institutionalise students' participation in school governance and endeavours by involving them in decision-making processes and providing slots to upper secondary student representatives in the consultative committee on education policy.
3. Increase the education budget up to the level of the OECD average, which allows for an increase in the number of trained, qualified, and motivated teachers and school counsellors. This will help reduce the class sizes and workload of teachers. Increasing resources for education will also enable the establishment of support systems that can address

cases of bullying and the varying causes of children's refusal to go to school.

4. Integrate comprehensive sexuality education in schools and other education institutions to promote gender equality among teachers and staff, including building gender-responsive infrastructure to make schools safer for all.
5. Establish quality and disaggregated data collection system through consultations with CSOs to capture the situation of marginalised groups, including foreign learners, migrants, and illiterate adults, and to identify their learning needs.
6. The Kominkan or the CLCs in Japan should respond to the learning needs of migrant workers and those who are illiterate, expand programmes for Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and ESD, and make efforts to organise the community to respond to current issues and challenges.
7. Increase the budget and support to non-formal education institutions and CSOs that promote ESD and GCED.
8. Substantially increase Japan's ODA to basic education⁷ and contributions to multilateral organisations, such as the GPE and ECW. •

⁷ For details on Japan's aid to education, refer to UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020, p. 410, which can be accessed through this link: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718>



Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE) is a coalition of 21 Japanese NGOs working for education development in developing countries. Its mission is to contribute to achieving SDG 4 through advocacy, campaigning, capacity building, research and networking. JNNE is a member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).



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Development Education Association and Resource Centre (DEAR) is a network organisation that works with members at local and national levels to raise awareness and lead public understanding of global and development issues. Our mission is to build a just and sustainable world through promoting Development Education. Our role is to support learning in communities and schools by providing teaching materials, training facilitators, doing research, and advocating to the government. DEAR is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).