How Has the Wage Structure in Japan Changed?

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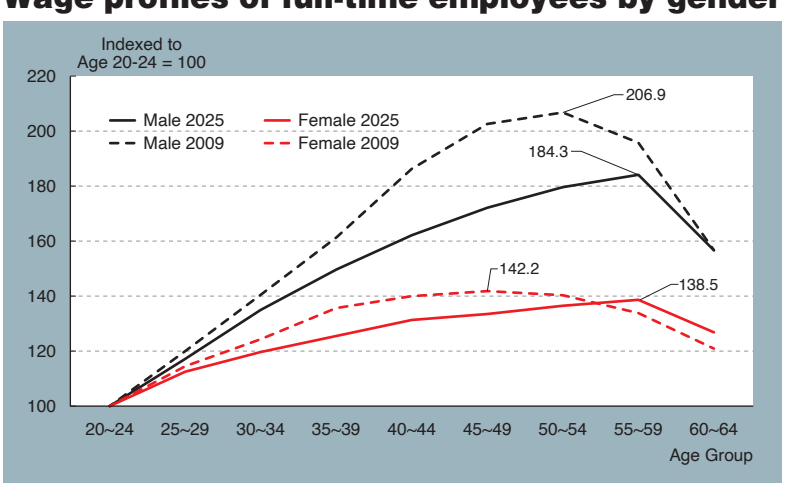
Over 3% Rise in Scheduled Wage for 2 Consecutive Years

According to the most recent "Basic Survey on Wage Structure" (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare), the average scheduled wage for ordinary workers in June 2025 was 340,600 yen, an increase of 3.1% compared to June 2024. Following a 3.8% increase in June 2024, it is the second consecutive year exceeding 3%. Although growth had been sluggish for over a decade since June 2009 when scheduled wages were the lowest in recent years, the trend has now turned upwards since June 2022.

While wage-related statistics include the "Monthly Labour Force Survey" (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) published every month, the "Basic Survey on Wage Structure" examines figures such as scheduled wages paid in June of each year. As it covers a large number of establishments, it is a particularly useful source of data for understanding structural changes. In this month's article, this survey is used to examine how Japan's wage structure has changed since 2009.

CHART 1

Wage profiles of full-time employees by gender



Source: "Basic Survey on Wage Structure", Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Increase Linked to Rise in Age Gradual Among Men

Looking at the highly watched average scheduled wages by age groups, while men peak at ages 55 to 59 (181.4 when ages 20 to 24 are set at 100), women peak at ages 45 to 49 and 55 to 59 (127.6 when ages 20 to 24 are set at 100). It has long been the trend that compared to men, increases in wages for women become more gradual as they age.

On the other hand, this data is average scheduled wages for both full-time workers and full-time staff and also others, and hence it is thought that the large number of those who are not full-time is a factor contributing to the gradual pace of wage increases for women. *Chart 1* thus compares wage curves for 2009 and 2025, focusing solely on full-time employees and full-time staff. For men, the extent of wage increases with a rise in age becomes considerably gradual, and the age at which wages peak has become gradual from ages 50 to 54 in 2009 to ages 55 to 59 in 2025. For women, although the age at which wages peak has become more gradual from ages 45 to 49 in 2009 to ages 55 to 59 in 2025, there has been little change in the extent of wage increases. Furthermore, when compared to figures that include those that are not full-time employees or full-time staff, the extent of wage increases with a rise in age is higher (if ages 20 to 24 years is set at 100, ages 55 to 59 years is 138.5).

Wage Increases Centered on Young People & Women

These changes are driven by wage increases centered on young people and women *(Chart 2)*. Comparing scheduled wages in 2025 to those in 2009, while they saw a 15% increase for men (all age groups), they were higher for women (all age groups) at 24%. By age groups, 20 to 24 and 25 to 29, both of which include new graduates, show high rates of increase in wages for both men and women. In particular, rates of increase in wages for these age groups in the last five years have been high at around 15% for both men and women. It is thought that this

impact reflects the increasing number of companies raising their starting salaries, with recruitment of new graduates becoming a seller's market. On the other hand, it has been said that wage increases for mid-career employees have been suppressed as a result, and indeed, the rate of increase in wages for men in their 40s is lower than that of other age groups. However, the rate of increase in wages for women is higher compared to men. Forty years have passed since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in the mid-1980s, and one reason behind the higher rate of increase in wages for women is the growing number of women continuing to work rather than leaving the workforce to give birth or for childcare.

Gender Disparity in Educational Background

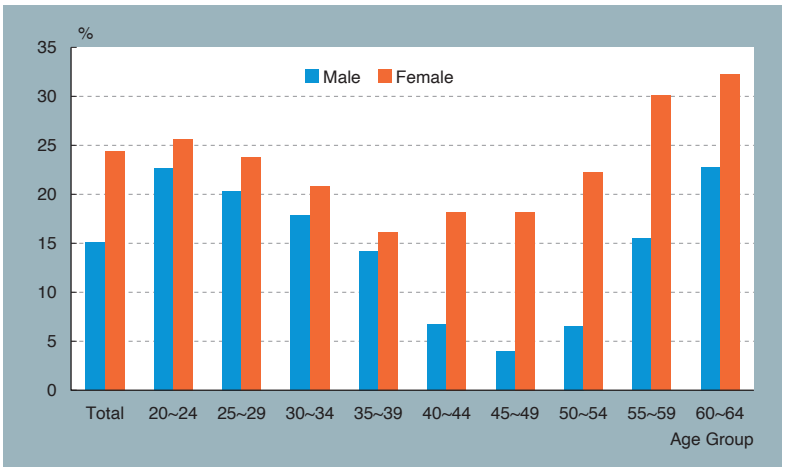
Gender disparity in wages is also gradually narrowing. Looking at all age groups for full-time employees and full-time staff, women's wages are 0.79 times those of men, with the disparity narrowing from 0.73 times in 2009. By age groups, wages for women and men were almost equal for 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 in both 2009 and 2025, but the narrowing of disparity is notable for the 40s and ages 50 to 54 *(Chart 3)*.

These changes are thought to be largely due to more working women with higher education. In 2025, there was no difference between the percentage of men and women in their 20s to early 40s amongst full-time employees and full-time staff who have graduated from universities and graduate schools. Furthermore, compared to 2009, the percentage of women who have graduated from universities and graduate schools has risen by more than 10 percentage points in almost all age groups, and for those in their 30s it has risen by 20 percentage points.

On the other hand, when comparing individuals with similar educational backgrounds, gender disparity has not necessarily narrowed. Looking at those who have graduated from universities and graduate schools, while the disparity narrowed in 2025 from 2009 for those in their 20s, late 50s and early 60s, it widened for other age groups.* As women tend to have fewer average number of years of service compared to men, this suggests that their careers may be interrupted by giving birth and childcare, or that appointment to higher managerial positions is not progressing. It looks like there are still many challenges to be addressed in order to eliminate gender disparity.

CHART 2

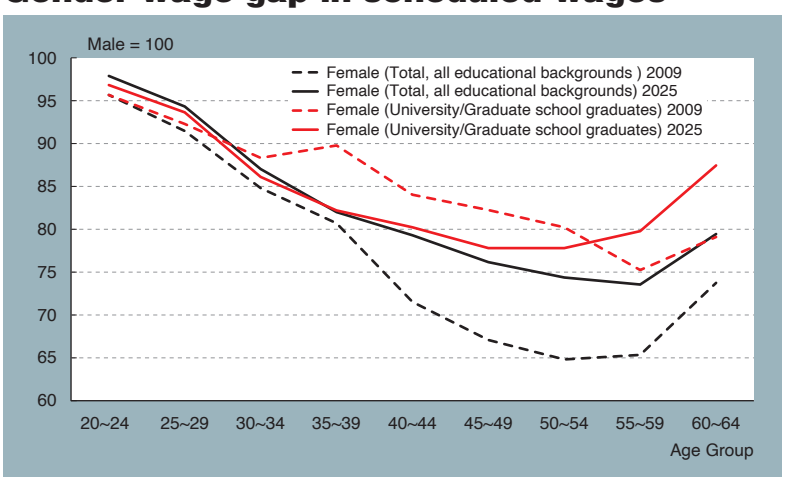
Growth rate of scheduled wages from 2009 to 2025



Source: "Basic Survey on Wage Structure", Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

CHART 3

Gender wage gap in scheduled wages



Source: "Basic Survey on Wage Structure", Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

* Data for 2025 is released separately for universities and graduate schools, but in order to make the comparison with the figures for 2009 easier, data has been processed by calculating the weighted average by the number of full-time employees and full-time staff.

NOTE: This article was based on information available as of May 9, 2026.

Article translated from the original Japanese by Mio Kawashima

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Calendar year, Quarter and Month	Real GDP		Nominal GDP		IIP rate of increase over previous year/term (month) (%)	CPI (All terms, less fresh food) rate of increase over previous year/the same term (month) of the previous year (%)
	Amount (trillion yen)	Rate of increase over previous year/term (%)	Amount (trillion yen)	Rate of increase over previous year/term (%)		
2018	580.9	0.8	569.2	0.7	0.6	0.9
2019	579.1	-0.3	571.8	0.5	-2.6	0.6
2020	554.3	-4.3	554.1	-3.1	-10.4	-0.2
2021	574.0	3.6	573.6	3.5	5.4	-0.2
2022	581.7	1.3	584.9	2.0	-0.1	2.3
2023	585.9	0.7	616.0	5.3	-1.3	3.1
2024	584.9	-0.2	634.8	3.0	-2.6	2.5
2025	591.1	1.1	663.5	4.5	-0.3	3.1
2025/2nd Qtr.	592.9	0.3	664.6	1.9	-0.5	3.5
3rd Qtr.	589.5	-0.6	665.6	0.2	-1.1	2.9
4thQtr.	590.5	0.2	671.5	0.9	0.3	2.8
2026/1st Qtr.	593.2	0.5	675.6	0.6	2.5	1.8
Sept.	—	—	—	—	1.8	2.9
Oct.	—	—	—	—	0.6	3.0
Nov.	—	—	—	—	-2.0	3.0
Dec	—	—	—	—	0.6	2.4
2026/Jan.	—	—	—	—	4.3	2.0
Feb.	—	—	—	—	-2.0	1.6
March	—	—	—	—	-0.4	1.8
April	—	—	—	—	0.5	1.4
Sources	"SNA (National Accounts of Japan)", Cabinet Office				"Indices of Industrial Production", Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry	"Consumer Price Index", Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

Calendar year, Quarter and Month	Foreign Trade Statistics									
	Exports amount (trillion yen)	Exports rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Imports amount (trillion yen)	Imports rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Exports amount to US (trillion yen)	Exports to US rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Imports amount from US (trillion yen)	Imports from US rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Exports amount to EU (trillion yen)	Exports to EU rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)
2018	81.5	4.1	82.7	9.7	15.5	2.4	9.0	11.4	7.7	7.8
2019	76.9	-5.6	78.6	-5.0	15.3	-1.4	8.6	-4.2	7.4	-3.0
2020	68.4	-11.1	68.0	-13.5	12.6	-17.3	7.5	-13.7	6.3	-15.1
2021	83.1	21.5	84.9	24.8	14.8	17.6	8.9	19.6	7.7	21.4
2022	98.2	18.2	118.5	39.6	18.3	23.1	11.8	31.9	9.4	22.0
2023	100.9	2.7	110.4	-6.8	20.3	11.0	11.6	-1.7	10.4	10.9
2024	107.1	6.2	112.7	2.1	21.3	5.1	12.7	9.8	10.0	-3.9
2025	110.4	3.1	113.3	0.5	20.4	-4.3	12.9	1.8	10.1	1.3
2025/2nd Qtr.	26.4	-0.1	27.1	-3.1	5.0	-8.3	3.1	-9.1	2.4	0.7
3rd Qtr.	27.2	0.3	27.9	-3.1	4.7	-12.8	3.3	5.7	2.5	2.1
4thQtr.	29.9	4.9	29.7	2.6	5.4	-2.5	3.4	12.6	2.8	9.8
2026/1st Qtr.	29.7	10.5	30.2	5.8	5.2	-3.1	3.4	9.9	2.8	19.1
Sept.	9.4	4.1	9.7	3.3	1.6	-13.7	1.1	7.0	0.9	5.0
Oct.	9.8	3.6	10.0	0.8	1.8	-3.1	1.2	21.1	0.9	9.2
Nov.	9.7	6.1	9.4	1.4	1.8	8.8	1.1	7.3	0.9	19.5
Dec	10.4	5.1	10.3	5.4	1.8	-11.1	1.1	9.3	1.0	2.5
2026/Jan.	9.2	16.8	10.4	-2.6	1.5	-5.1	1.1	3.2	0.8	29.6
Feb.	9.6	4.0	9.5	10.3	1.8	-8.0	1.1	8.5	0.9	14.0
March	11.0	11.5	10.4	11.0	1.9	3.4	1.2	18.1	1.0	16.1
April	10.5	14.8	10.2	9.8	1.9	9.5	1.2	23.3	1.1	27.0
Sources	"Trade Statistics of Japan", Ministry of Finance									

Calendar year, Quarter and Month	Cash salary amount rate of increase over previous year/the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Active job openings-to-applicants ratio (time(s))	Unemployment rate (%)	M2 rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Balance of payments		Yen/$ rate (averaged during the term)
					Trade balance (trillion yen)	Current balance (trillion yen)	
2018	1.4	1.61	2.4	2.9	1.1	19.5	110.4
2019	-0.4	1.60	2.4	2.4	0.2	19.3	109.0
2020	-1.2	1.18	2.8	6.5	2.8	16.0	106.8
2021	0.3	1.13	2.8	6.4	1.8	21.5	109.8
2022	2.0	1.28	2.6	3.3	-15.5	11.4	131.4
2023	1.2	1.31	2.6	2.5	-6.6	22.5	140.5
2024	2.8	1.25	2.5	1.7	-2.7	29.3	151.5
2025	2.3	1.22	2.5	1.2	-0.6	32.2	149.6
2025/2nd Qtr.	2.4	1.23	2.5	0.7	-0.0	7.0	144.5
3rd Qtr.	2.4	1.21	2.5	1.3	0.2	10.7	147.5
4thQtr.	2.2	1.19	2.6	1.7	0.7	7.3	154.1
2026/1st Qtr.	3.0	1.19	2.7	1.8	0.5	9.5	156.9
Sept.	2.1	1.20	2.6	1.5	0.2	4.4	147.9
Oct.	2.5	1.19	2.6	1.6	0.0	2.7	151.3
Nov.	1.7	1.19	2.6	1.7	0.6	3.7	155.1
Dec	2.4	1.20	2.6	1.7	0.1	0.9	155.9
2026/Jan.	2.5	1.18	2.7	1.6	-0.6	0.9	156.8
Feb.	3.4	1.19	2.6	1.7	0.3	3.9	155.2
March	3.1	1.18	2.7	2.0	0.8	4.7	158.6
April	3.5	1.18	2.5	2.3	0.4	3.9	159.3
Sources	"Monthly Labour Survey", Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare	"Employment Referrals for General Workers", Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare	"Labour Force Survey", Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications	"Money Stock", Bank of Japan	"Balance of Payments", Ministry of Finance		Bank of Japan

Calendar year, Quarter and Month	Foreign Trade Statistics									
	Imports amount from EU (trillion yen)	Imports from EU rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Exports amount to Asia (excluding China) (trillion yen)	Exports to Asia (excluding China) rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Imports amount from Asia (excluding China) (trillion yen)	Imports from Asia (excluding China) rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Exports amount to China (trillion yen)	Exports to China rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)	Imports amount from China (trillion yen)	Imports from China rate of increase over previous year/ the same term (month) of the previous year (%)
2018	8.8	10.6	28.8	2.9	20.0	7.8	15.9	6.8	19.2	4.0
2019	8.8	0.3	26.6	-7.6	19.0	-5.3	14.7	-7.6	18.5	-3.9
2020	7.8	-12.1	24.1	-9.4	17.2	-9.4	15.1	2.7	17.5	-5.1
2021	9.5	21.8	30.2	25.0	20.7	20.6	18.0	19.2	20.4	16.4
2022	11.4	21.1	36.4	20.6	28.6	37.8	19.0	5.7	24.8	21.9
2023	11.4	-0.2	34.7	-4.6	27.6	-3.4	17.8	-6.5	24.4	-1.7
2024	12.0	4.7	38.0	9.4	28.6	3.7	18.9	6.2	25.3	3.6
2025	12.8	6.6	41.1	8.2	29.1	1.6	18.8	-0.4	26.7	5.5
2025/2nd Qtr.	3.2	7.1	9.8	6.6	6.8	-2.7	4.6	-4.7	6.4	3.2
3rd Qtr.	3.2	-1.3	10.3	4.9	7.2	-3.3	4.7	0.5	6.5	2.5
4thQtr.	3.3	6.0	11.0	8.6	7.6	3.3	5.1	1.8	7.3	5.6
2026/1st Qtr.	3.3	6.1	11.5	15.4	8.0	7.6	4.9	11.5	7.3	12.6
Sept.	1.1	11.3	3.6	10.7	2.6	3.0	1.6	5.8	2.4	9.8
Oct.	1.0	-9.0	3.5	5.3	2.6	0.3	1.7	2.1	2.5	0.8
Nov.	1.0	6.6	3.6	7.9	2.4	4.3	1.6	-2.5	2.4	2.4
Dec	1.2	21.6	3.9	12.5	2.6	5.4	1.8	5.5	2.5	14.7
2026/Jan.	1.0	-1.1	3.7	23.3	2.7	-1.2	1.5	32.0	2.6	0.6
Feb.	1.1	3.1	3.7	8.9	2.4	7.0	1.4	-11.0	2.3	35.5
March	1.2	16.7	4.2	15.0	2.9	17.9	2.0	17.7	2.3	8.9
April	1.0	3.8	4.0	16.3	2.9	29.9	1.8	15.5	2.6	14.9
Sources	"Trade Statistics of Japan", Ministry of Finance									