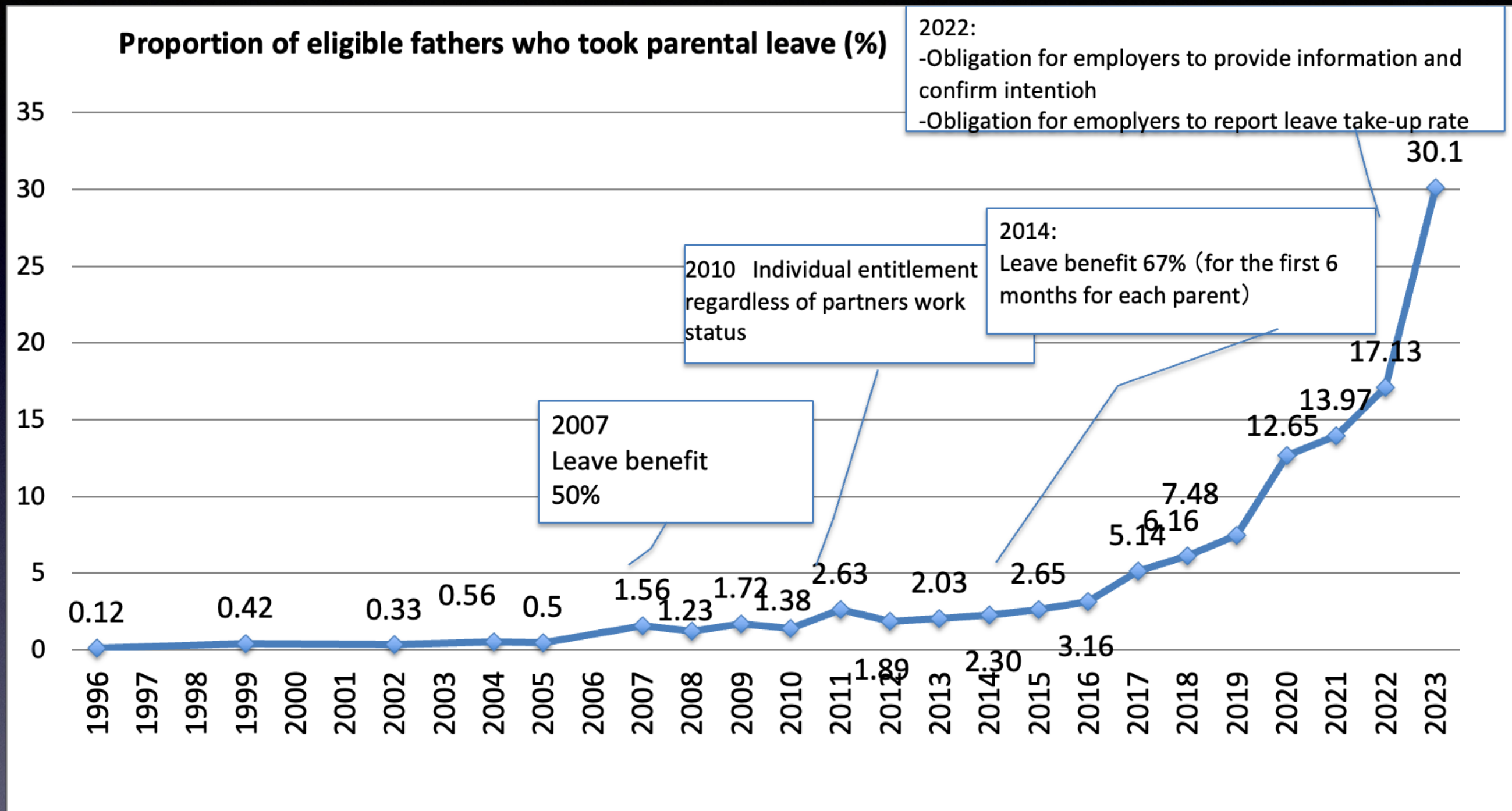


International Network on Leave Policies & Research
Annual Seminar
12-13 June 2025
Vilnius, Lithuania

Policies and Politics for Inclusive Parental Leave:
The Case of Japan in International Comparison

Hideki Nakazato (Konan University)

Growing Interest in Men's Parental Leave in Japan



High media and societal attention.
Uptake rates and duration of male parental leave have increased.

Japan's parental leave scheme

| Age | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|--|---|-------------|---|---|---|-------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|----|-----------------------|---|-------------|---|-----------------------|---|---|---|-------|---|----|----|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Months | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Japan Basic entitlement | Maximum age | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Mother | Mat. L | | Par.L (67%) | | | | | | | | Par.L (50%) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Father | Par. L | | | | | | | | Par.L (67%) | | | | | | Par.L (50%) | | | | | | Bonus | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Japan With maximum extension | Maximum age | Until the acceptance into the childcare (Max. 2 years) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Mother | Mat. L | | Par.L (67%) | | | | | | | | Par.L (50%) | | | | | | Par.L (Extension 50%) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Father | Par.L (67%) | | | | | | Par.L (50%) | | | | | | Par.L (Extension 50%) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

There are formal childcare for children under age 1. More places for children age 1 or older. Most places become open in April (start of school calendar). Availability is not ensured.

There are formal childcare for children under age 1. More places for children age 1 or older. Most places become open in April (start of school calendar). Availability is not ensured.

Basic entitlement: 1 year for each parent (until the child turns 1 year old (14 months when both parents takes leave))

Extension until 2 years (in case of no room in childcare)

Benefit: 67% for 6 months, 50% for the rest.

Exemptions from social insurance premiums and income tax.

Recent changes in Japan's parental leave scheme

Effective in April 2025

Employment Insurance Act

The Postpartum Leave Support Benefit:

13% for up to 4 weeks for each parent (when the other parent is on leave or not working within 8 weeks after birth) + Parental leave benefit + Exemptions from social insurance premiums and income tax.

—>Effectively 100 per cent

Japan's position on Leave
inclusiveness in employment status

Parental leave benefit for self-employed

| | Japan (Apr 2024). | Sweden (Apr2024). | Germany (Apr2024). |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Financial Sources for leave benefit | Employment insurance | Social insurance (including self-employed) | General taxation |
| Application to self-employed persons | No | Yes | Yes |

Discussion of legal changes on the inclusion of self-employed and freelance workers and the turnaround of plans on this

The Government was announcing the possibility to establish a new system for self-employed persons similar to the existing parental leave benefit.



The government abandoned the idea and changed its policy to 'establish an exemption from insurance premiums for the childcare period'.

Purpose of this presentation:

Analysing the process of the discussion and
the actors

Methods

Tracking the policy-making process using the records of the discussion and produced reports by the Governmental councils, committees, and the National Diet.

From 2022 to May 2025.

With the help of various tools in finding related discussions and materials: Chat GPT, Python, Ailyse.

Council for Building a Social
Security System Oriented to All

2021-11-09 – 2024-12-06
20 sessions in total

2022-12-16 Final Report:
Support for individuals not
covered by parental leave
benefits

Inter-Ministerial Meeting on
Strengthening Child Policies

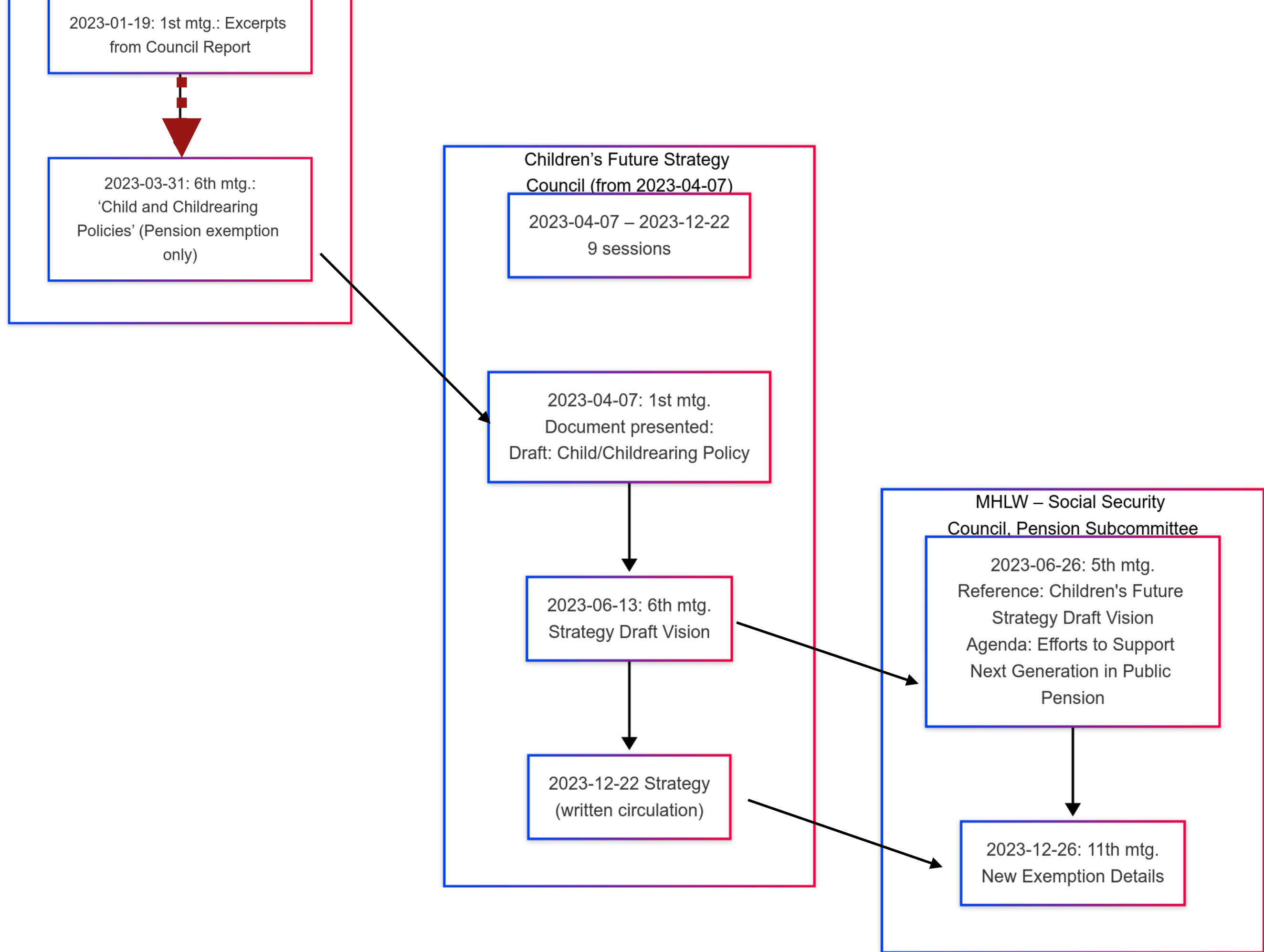
2023-01-19 – 2023-03-31
6 sessions

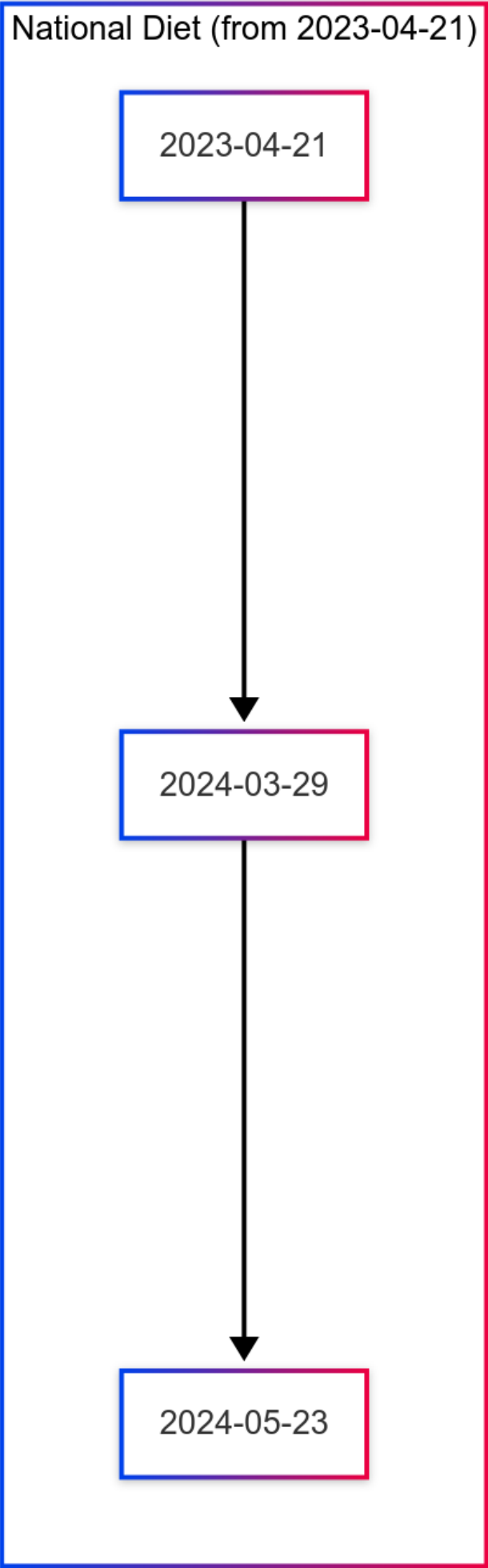
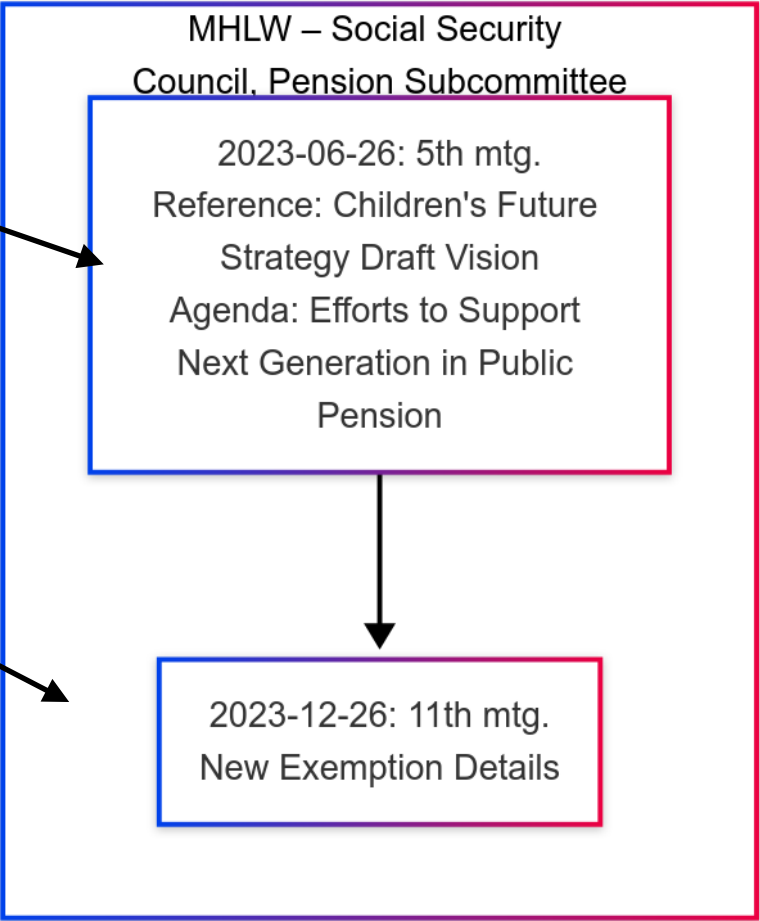
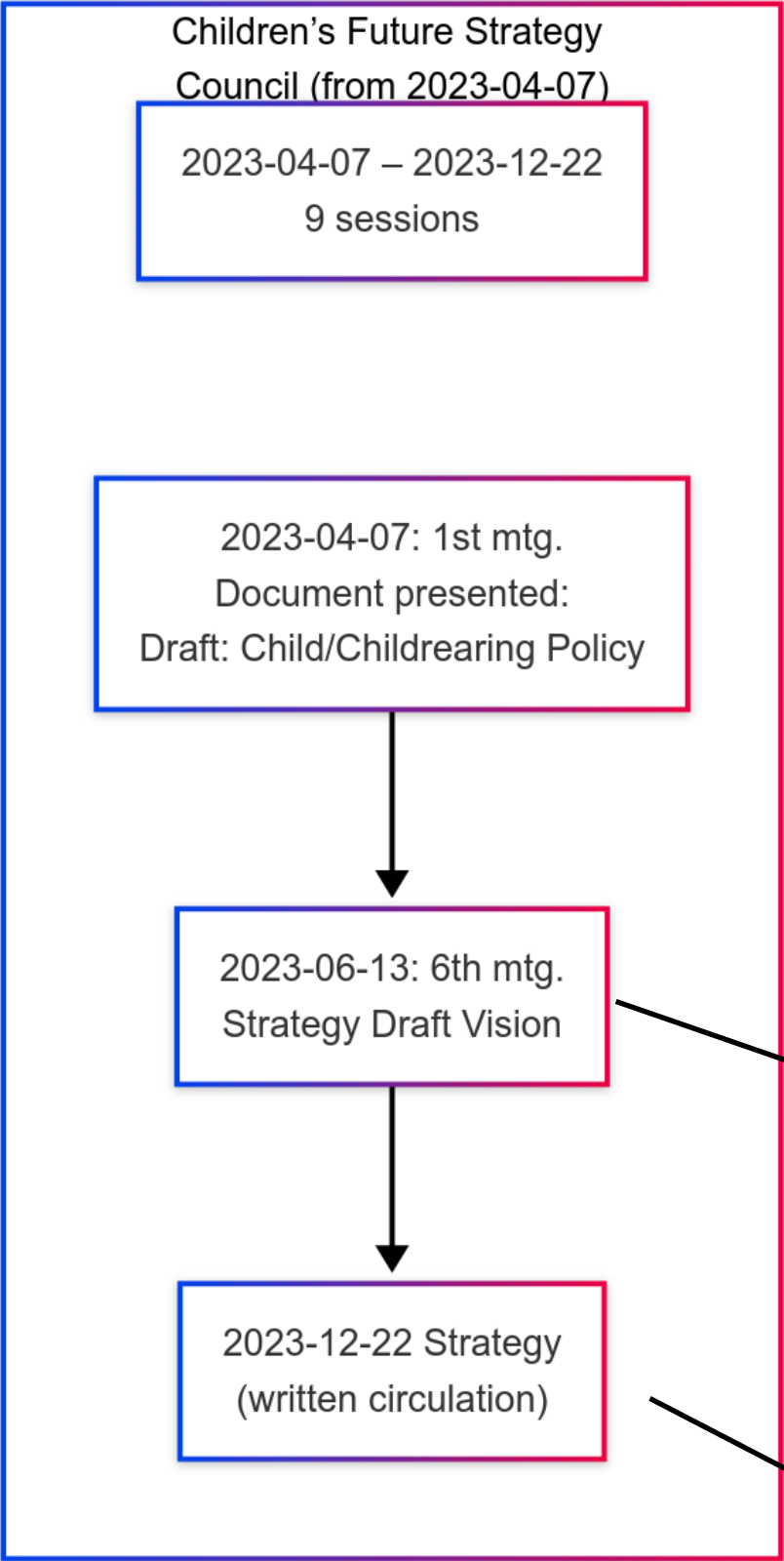
2023-01-19: 1st mtg.: Excerpts
from Council Report

2023-03-31: 6th mtg.:
'Child and Childrearing
Policies' (Pension exemption
only)

Children's Future Strategy
Council (from 2023-04-07)

2023-04-07 – 2023-12-22
9 sessions





Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare — Labour Policy Council,
Employment Insurance Subcommittee, Subcommittee on
Employment Insurance

2022-03-31

Explanation by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare official
(regarding the supplementary resolution on the Bill for Partial
Amendment of the Employment Insurance Act, etc.)

It has been stipulated that, by fiscal year 2024, not only
should the provisional measures for reducing the national
government's share of parental leave benefits be reviewed,
but consideration should also be given to how funding for
parental leave benefits should be secured. This includes
building a support system for parenting and childcare that
goes beyond employed workers and extends to a broader
societal framework, such as those working as freelancers.

Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations

From 2021-11-09 to 2024-12-06 (20 sessions in total)

Responsible official: Minister of State for Special Missions (in charge of All-Generation Social Security Reform), Cabinet Office

1. Purpose

To comprehensively examine the entire social security system from the perspective of building a sustainable, all-generation-inclusive social security system, the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”) is convened.

2. Composition

(1) The Council is composed of the individuals listed in Appendix 1 and is held under the authority of the Minister in charge of All-Generation Social Security Reform.

Members: Researchers in fields such as education, law, medicine, economics, and related disciplines.

9th Meeting of the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations

2022-11-24

Statement from Professor Mizushima (Ikuko Mizushima, Executive Director and Vice President, Osaka University; specialising in labour law and social security law)

“Furthermore, if we are to pursue a work-style neutral social security system, it is not appropriate to provide fragmented benefits funded from different sources to individuals who are excluded from parental leave benefits under employment insurance during the childrearing period—such as short-time workers, the self-employed, and freelancers. Going forward, it will be necessary to consider separating parental leave benefits from the employment insurance scheme and establishing a universal system.”

11th Meeting

2022-12-14

○ Member Kasagi (Eri Kasagi, Professor, Graduate Schools for Law and Politics, The University of Tokyo; specialising in social security law and labour law)

“This is not to suggest that ultimately all individuals, including the self-employed, should be subject to the exact same system. However, starting from the concept of ‘workers,’ I believe it is important that we interpret ‘working people’ as broadly as possible and proceed with the discussion accordingly. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to confirm this point.”

12th Meeting

2022-12-16

— Agenda

2. On the Council's Final Report

Document 1: Final Report of the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations

◆ Support for individuals not covered by parental leave benefits

Consideration should also be given to the establishment of benefit schemes during the child-rearing period for self-employed persons, freelancers, gig workers, and others who are currently excluded from parental leave benefits, from the perspective of addressing opportunity losses in employment during the childrearing phase.

Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Child Policies

From 2023-01-19 to 2023-03-31 (6 sessions in total)

1. Purpose

Following the establishment of the Children and Families Agency, child policies are to be comprehensively promoted across the government. In order to intensively deliberate on the ideal direction and the priority areas to be accelerated in the near term to strengthen child policies—positioned as an “investment in the future”—the Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Child Policies is convened under the Minister in charge of Child Policies.

Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Child Policies

From 2023-01-19 to 2023-03-31 (6 sessions in total)

Responsible body: Cabinet Secretariat,
Minister for Child Policies (Chair)

Members: Senior officials from relevant ministries and agencies, including the Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

1st Meeting — Thursday, January 19, 2023

2023-01-19

As part of the meeting materials, Document 4: Excerpts from the Final Report of the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations (December 16, 2022) was distributed.

6th Meeting

2023-03-31

In the summary proposal presented by the secretariat titled “Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies (Draft)”, the discussion is narrowed to pension premium exemptions.

“Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies (Draft)”

Child and Childrearing Support Acceleration Plan

○ The next 6 to 7 years leading up to the 2030s represent the last opportunity to reverse the declining birthrate trend. Measures to address the declining birthrate are at a critical juncture and cannot be delayed. Based on this understanding, in order to accelerate efforts, the government will implement the Child and Childrearing Support Acceleration Plan (hereinafter “the Acceleration Plan”) **over the next three years** as a focused period of intensive action.

“Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies (Draft)”

3. Promoting Dual-Income and Co-Parenting Models

(3) Supporting work–childrearing balance across diverse employment styles — Securing a range of options

○ For Category I insured persons under the National Pension system, such as the self-employed and freelancers, consideration will be given to the creation of a new exemption from pension premiums during the childrearing period—building on the existing premium exemption system for the pre- and postnatal periods and taking into account the practices under employee pension schemes.

Discussion at the Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Child Policies

No full minutes are available—only summaries of proceedings—but numerous expert reports were submitted.

However, in the final compiled report, without any clear indication that these matters were substantively discussed during the meetings, the proposal concerning the expansion of parental leave benefits was dropped.

Instead, the only recommendation that remained was the consideration of introducing a pension premium exemption during the child-rearing period.

Children's Future Strategy Council

From 2023-04-07 to 2023-12-22 (9 sessions in total)

1. Purpose

Japan's declining birthrate—a long-standing issue—has become increasingly severe in recent years, reaching a state that could be described as a “quiet emergency.” In order to achieve sustainable socio-economic development and maintain the social security system and local communities, it is essential to undertake bold and unprecedented measures to address the declining birthrate by combining all possible policy tools.

To that end, it is necessary to deliberate on the content of concrete child and childrearing policies, including budgets and funding sources. For this purpose, the Children's Future Strategy Council (hereinafter referred to as “the Council”) is convened under the Headquarters for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations, involving relevant cabinet ministers, experts, individuals with parenting experience, related stakeholders, and relevant organisations.

Children's Future Strategy Council

From 2023-04-07 to 2023-12-22 (9 sessions
in total)

2. Composition

The members of the Council are as follows. However, the Chair may request the attendance of additional relevant persons when deemed necessary.

Chair: Prime Minister

Vice-Chairs: Minister in charge of All-Generation Social Security Reform; Minister of State for Special Missions (in charge of child policy, declining birthrate, youth affairs, and gender equality)

Members: Chief Cabinet Secretary; Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications; Minister of Finance; Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare; Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry; Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism; and experts designated by the Prime Minister

Children's Future Strategy Council

From 2023-04-07 to 2023-12-22 (9 sessions
in total)

Expert Members: Researchers from universities and think tanks; representatives of business organisations; representatives from national labour unions; the chairpersons of governors' and mayors' associations; and representatives of childcare-related NPOs.

Children's Future Strategy Council

1st Meeting — 2023-04-07

Document presented:

“Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies (Draft)” (dated March 31, 2023)

3rd Meeting of the Children's Future Strategy Council —
2023-05-17

○ Member Seike (Atsushi Seike, labour economist):

“I believe that the newly proposed measures in the Acceleration Plan—such as support for freelancers, the self-employed, and those working reduced hours—are all necessary initiatives.”

Children's Future Strategy Council

6th Meeting — 2023-06-13

Children's Future Strategy Draft Vision — 2023-06-13

“As a support measure equivalent to income compensation during the childrearing period for the self-employed, freelancers, and others, a new exemption from pension premiums during the childrearing period will be introduced for Category I insured persons under the National Pension system. In doing so, the current premium exemption systems for the pre- and postnatal periods and the exemption measures under employee insurance schemes during parental leave will serve as references. The concrete design—such as the exemption period and benefit levels—will be promptly considered, aiming for implementation by fiscal year 2026.”

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare – Social Security Council, Pension Subcommittee

5th Meeting 2023-06-26

Reference Document: “Children’s Future Strategy Draft Vision”

Agenda Item:

(1) Efforts to Support the Raising of the Next Generation within the Public Pension System

The final report of last year’s Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations pointed out the need to consider the establishment of benefit schemes during the child-rearing period for self-employed individuals, freelancers, and gig workers who are Category I insured persons under the National Pension system.

Further discussions have taken place in forums such as the Children’s Future Strategy Council, and page 7 of the materials shows an excerpt from the Children’s Future Strategy Draft Vision, which was approved by Cabinet decision on June 13.

5th Meeting 2023-06-26

(cont.)

“As a support measure equivalent to income compensation during the childrearing period for the self-employed, freelancers, and others, a new exemption from pension premiums during the childrearing period will be introduced for Category I insured persons. In doing so, the current exemption measures will be referenced, and concrete design elements such as the exemption period and benefit levels will be promptly examined, with implementation targeted for fiscal year 2026.”

Today, in line with this policy to “promptly examine the concrete design”, we would like to proceed with discussions on the key issues going forward.

11th Pension Subcommittee Meeting

26 December 2023

Speaker: Director, Pension Division

Key Points of the Proposed System Design:

New Exemption: Introduce a premium exemption for National Pension Category I insured persons during the childrearing period (in addition to existing maternity and parental leave exemptions under other schemes).

Eligibility:

- Applies to both parents (including adoptive parents) raising a child.
- No income or leave-taking requirements, recognising the diversity of work and income situations among the self-employed, freelancers, and non-working individuals.

Exemption Period:

- Until the child turns one year old.

Pension Benefits:

- Full basic pension entitlement will be secured for the exemption period.

National Diet

Since the compilation of the “Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies (Draft)” by the Inter-Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Child Policies in 2023, both ruling and opposition party lawmakers have repeatedly questioned the government in the Diet about the need to extend parental leave benefits to the self-employed and freelancers.

However, ministers and officials from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare have consistently responded by stating that the government will implement an exemption from pension premiums instead.

211th Session of the National Diet — House of Councillors Plenary
Session No. 17 — April 21, 2023

Ayaka Shiomura (Constitutional Democratic Party / Social Democratic Party):

“The report compiled by the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations in December last year stated that consideration would be given to establishing benefit schemes during the childrearing period for the self-employed, freelancers, gig workers, and others. However, the draft proposal titled ‘Strengthening Child and Childrearing Policies’, released at the end of last month, mentions only the consideration of introducing a pension premium exemption during the childrearing period. This marks a significant retreat from the original direction of creating a benefit scheme.

As I mentioned earlier, a survey by RENGO (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) clearly shows that what people actually need is the establishment of a benefit system. Why has the policy shifted backwards? It should be reconsidered.”

213th Session of the National Diet — House of
Representatives — Plenary Session No. 15 — March 29, 2024

Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare (Keizo Takemi):

You asked about the provision of parental leave benefits to freelancers and others who are not eligible for employment insurance.

.. On the other hand, providing parental leave benefits to individuals who cannot enroll in employment insurance involves numerous challenges, including how to fund such a scheme, and is therefore difficult. Instead, as a support measure equivalent to financial benefits during the childrearing period for self-employed and freelance workers, we have submitted to this Diet session a bill that includes the creation of a premium exemption during the childrearing period for Category I insured persons under the National Pension system.

213th Session of the National Diet — House of
Councillors — Cabinet Committee — Meeting No. 16
2024-05-23

○ Tetsushi Inoue (Japanese Communist Party):

“There is already a premium exemption during childcare leave under the Employees’ Pension Insurance system, so I don’t believe the exemption being proposed can truly be considered equivalent to a financial benefit.

Looking back at the December 2022 report by the Council for Building a Social Security System Oriented to All Generations, it clearly stated that the creation of benefits during the child-rearing period for the self-employed, freelancers, and gig workers should be considered as a way to address opportunity losses in employment during the parenting phase. That direction must not be abandoned.”

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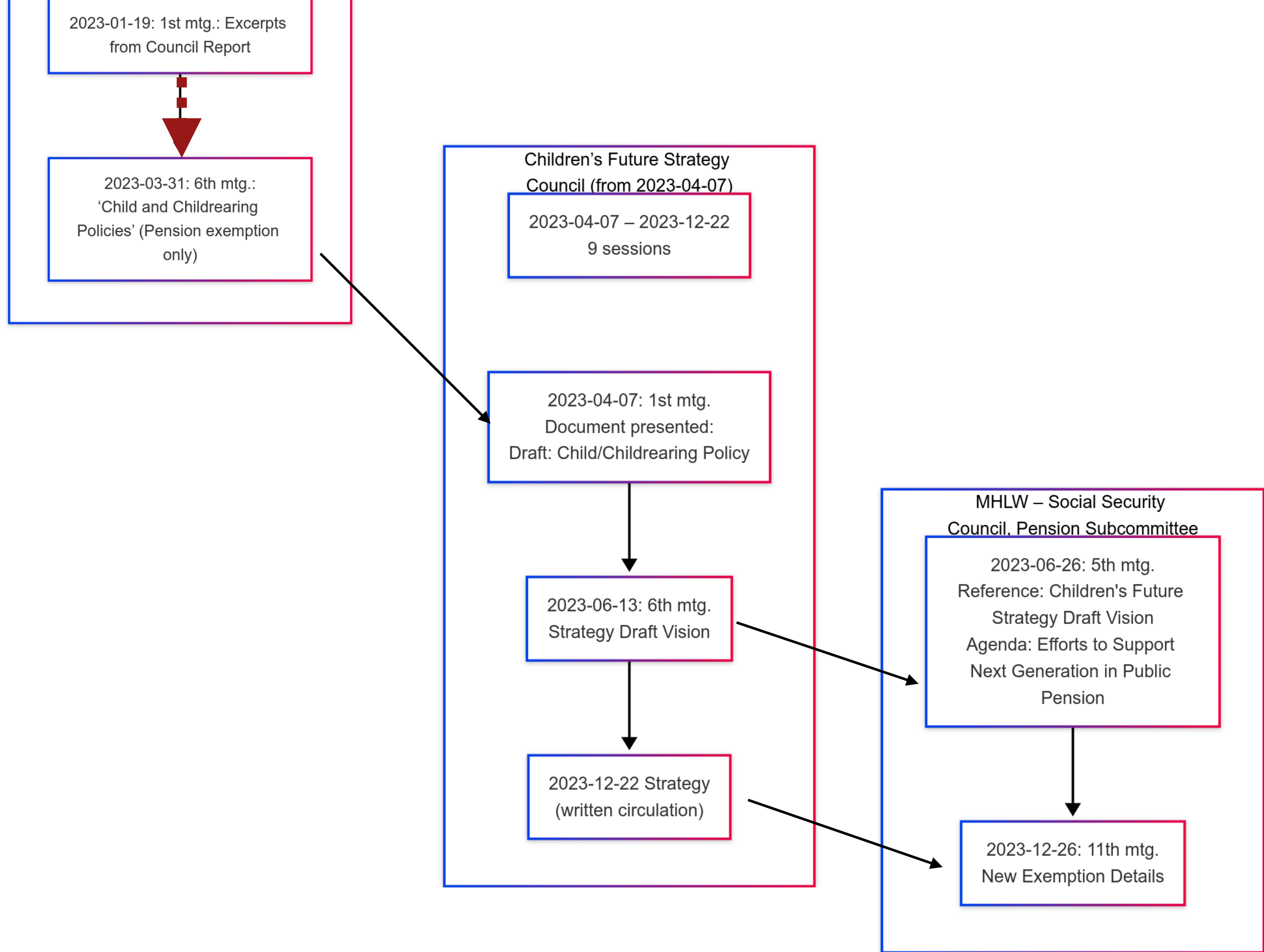
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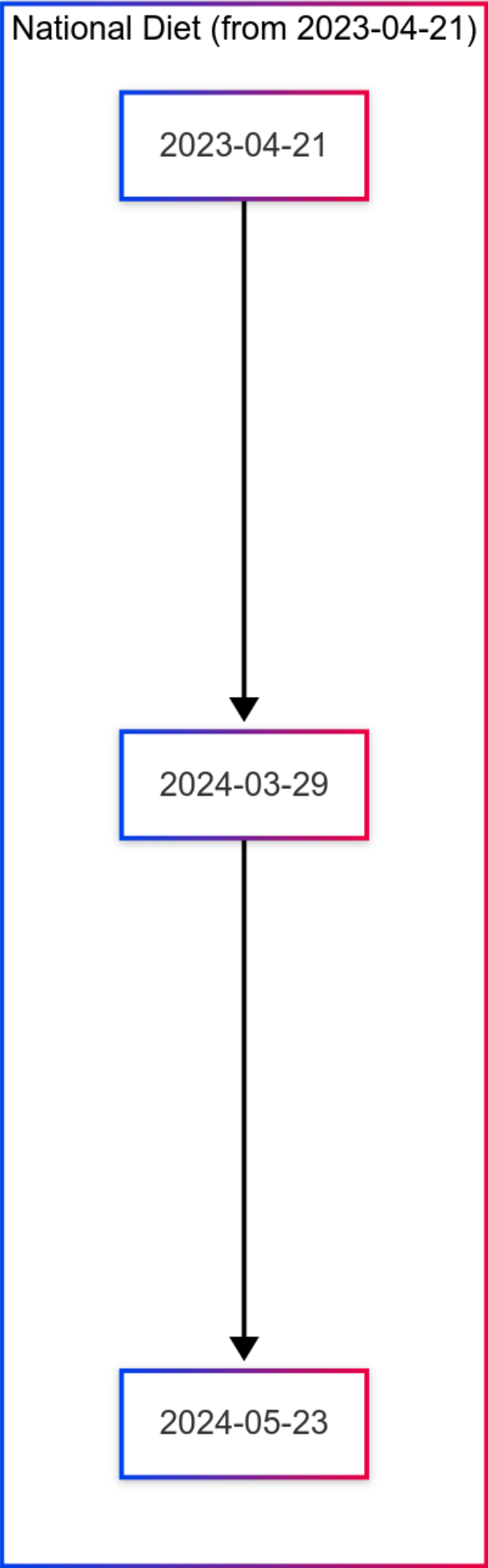
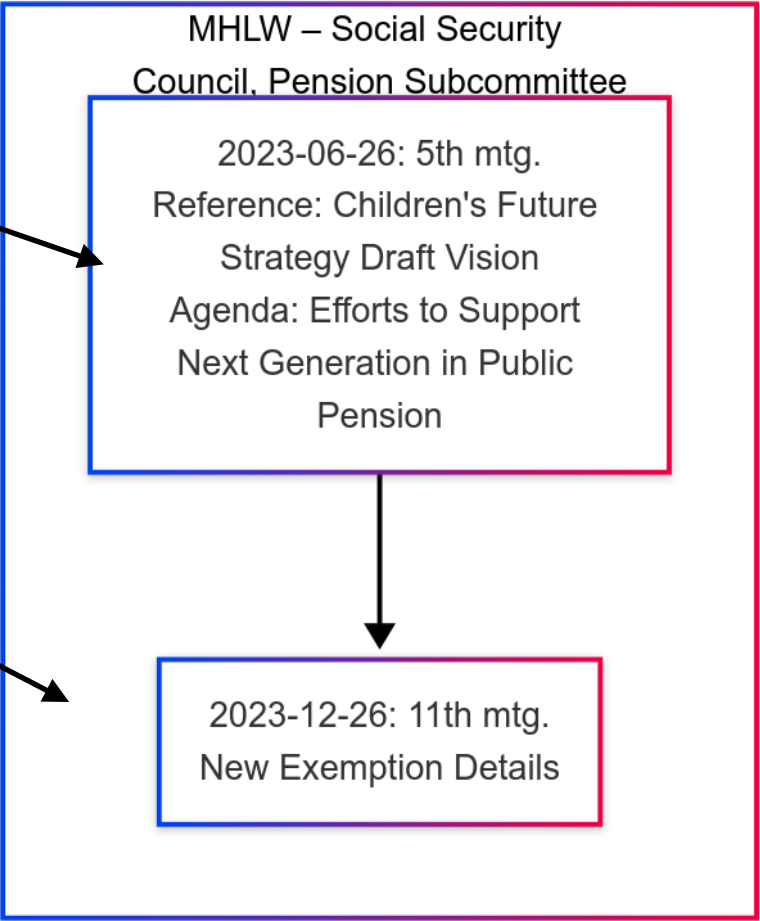
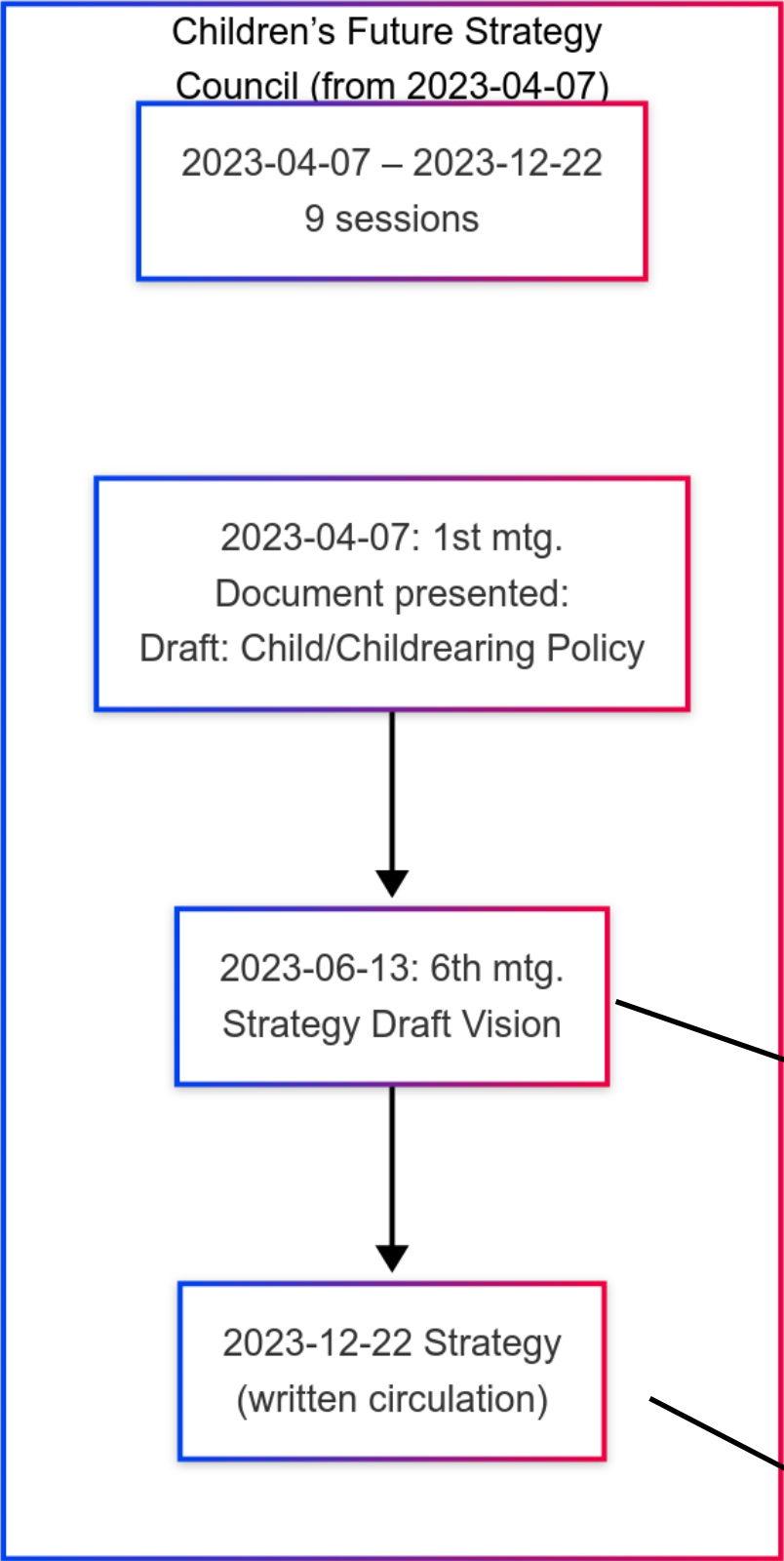
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9 sessions





Provisional Conclusion

Provisional Conclusion

- A broad range of policy actors—including Diet members and advisory council members—have repeatedly called for the establishment of parental leave benefits or an alternative framework for self-employed and freelance workers.
- However, due to the institutional design challenges cited by the government, the issue appears to be postponed rather than resolved.