

Executive Summary

I. Introduction and Background

Following the amendment to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act of Japan in 1990, the number of Japanese-descendants, also known as “Nikkeijin,” staying and working in Japan drastically increased. At its peak, almost 400,000 Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese-Peruvians were in Japan as long-term residents. They are often accompanied by family members or have formed a family in Japan. Their children started attending Japanese public schools, while others chose to attend private ethnic schools. In 2008, the “Lehman shock” shook the world economy and its effect lingered through 2009 and beyond. In Japan, factories which used to employ foreign workers had to scale down their business, rendering many of the Nikkeijin unemployed. Long-term resident foreign workers who lost their job could no longer afford to pay the high tuition fee for private ethnic schools their children go. Although many of these children managed to get transferred to Japanese public schools, which are tuition-free, others faced the risk of indefinitely remaining out of school, due to financial difficulties of their parents, lack of sufficient Japanese language proficiency to follow classes at the Japanese public schools, and general instability and uncertainty of their life in Japan.

The education issue of long-term resident migrant children brought by the global economic crisis had a potential of developing into a social problem, e.g. idle youth, youth delinquency, and lost potential young human resources. Aiming to respond to the situation and support these migrant children in their education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japan decided to establish a multi-year fund called the “Bridge School Fund” with JPY 3,725,754,000 budget (approx. USD 39 million) from the emergency supplementary budget of fiscal year 2009. Given its international experience in migrant integration assistance programmes, IOM was requested by MEXT to manage the Fund and implement a “Support Programme to Facilitate School Education for Foreign Children in Japan” (also known as the “Bridge School Programme”). The Programme started in July 2009 and was initially envisaged for three years, i.e. from FY2009 through FY2011 (until March 2012). However, because of the continuing need and existence of remaining funding as well as steady achievements made, MEXT extended the Programme for another three years, until March 2015.

II. Overview of the Programme

The following is a brief overview of the Bridge School Programme.

➤ Purposes:

- To establish Bridge Schools for migrant children in localities with high concentration of migrants in order to facilitate their smooth transfer to public and other schools;
- For such Bridge Schools to implement activities to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding between migrant communities and host / local Japanese communities; and

- To create ably-paid employment opportunities for Japanese instructors and other staff involved in migrant children education and migrant integration issues (who often engage with such activities on pro bono basis), so as to provide them with stable income and stimulate local economies.
- Main Beneficiaries:
 - School-age migrant children who are out of school.
- Main Activities:
 - Create an educational space for out-of-school migrant children to study, learn and belong to;
 - Conduct classes on Japanese language and other subjects;
 - Assist migrant children's learning process via their mother tongues by bilingual instructors;
 - Promote smooth transfer of these migrant children to formal schools, and communications with local residents through interventions by Bridge School coordinators.
- Timeframe:
 - Migrant children can stay in a Bridge School normally for up to six months, in principle, after which they are supposed to transfer to Japanese public schools or private ethnic schools, as appropriate.
- Budget:
 - Maximum annual budget for a Bridge School is JPY 20,000,000 (approx. USD 200,000).
 - Within the annual budget, approximately JPY 500,000 (approx. USD 5,000) could be spent for a migrant child attending a Bridge School, per year.
- Implementing Partners:
 - During the first phase (FY2009 – FY2011), an average of 40 IPs per year ran Bridge Schools. During the second phase (FY2012-FY2014), an average of 20 IPs per year ran Bridge Schools. A few IPs managed several Bridge Schools in a given year.
 - Selection of IPs, by the independent Selection Committee, was conducted on a yearly basis through a competitive “calls for proposals,” and the contract was concluded with IOM for 12 months (except for the first year).
 - IPs will have to possess a legal personality in Japan, and their legal personalities included: local public entities (local municipality itself or Education Board); Non-Profit Organisations (NPO); School Corporations; Social Welfare Service Corporations; Religious Corporations; and University Corporations.
- Roles of IOM as a Bridge School Fund Secretariat:

With the request by MEXT, IOM played the following roles;

 - Manage yearly calls for proposals and assist the Selection Committee (consisted of experts

- on migrant children education issues) to screen applications from potential IPs;
- Conclude contracts with each of the IPs, monitor implementation through monthly reports and onsite visits, and provide guidance, advice and suggestions on substantial, managerial and administrative issues, as appropriate.
- Organise all-IP-meetings (also called “coordinators meeting”), generally once a year, where IPs could exchange experiences, lessons learned, information and views.

III. Children at the Bridge Schools

During the six years of Programme implementation, a total of 8,751 migrant children attended the Bridge Schools. They consist of (A) children for whom IPs can claim expenses from the Programme (so-called “targeted children”), and (B) children who can attend Bridge Schools at the own expenses of IPs (so-called “untargeted children”), with both groups including various sub-categories. Although some changes were made throughout the lifecycle of the Programme, the division of sub-categories since FY2013 was as follows:

➤ Group A (“targeted children”):

- (a) Completely out of school (not enrolled in any Japanese public school/ethnic school)
- (b) Enrolled in Japanese public schools, but is not attending regularly for various reasons
- (c) Enrolled in ethnic (mainly Brazilian) schools, but cannot pay the whole tuition fee, and would like to study Japanese
- (d-1) “Graduates” from bridge schools, who are enrolled in and attending Japanese public schools regularly, but have difficulty in Japanese language skills and need supplementary opportunities for learning Japanese. Request from the principal of the public school is required for the child to be regarded as “targeted”
- (f-1) Under the compulsory schooling age, but intend to enter Japanese public schools; regarded as target for 6 months, from October of the year before entering elementary school to end of March.
- (g) Over the compulsory schooling age (in their high school age), but not enrolled in schools; trying to prepare for a “Junior High School Graduate Equivalency Examination” and / or entrance examinations for high school education

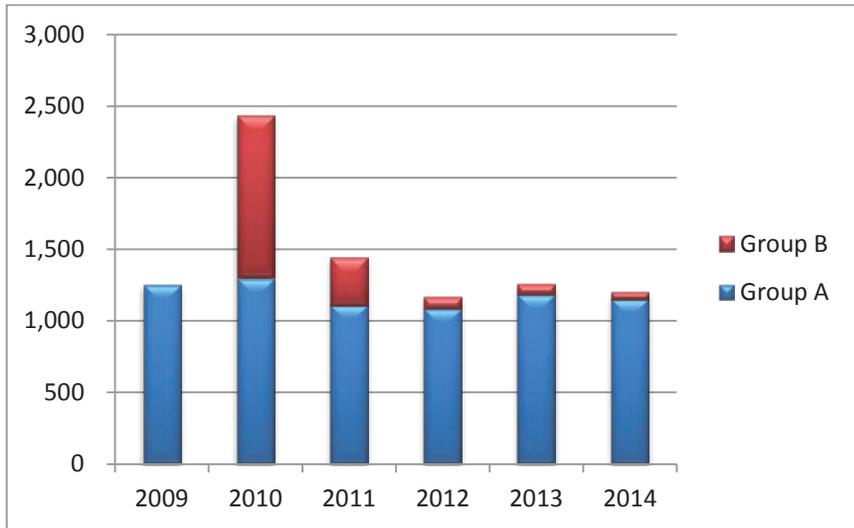
➤ Group B (“untargeted children”):

- (d-2) Enrolled in and attending Japanese public schools regularly but have difficulty in Japanese language skills and need supplementary opportunities for learning Japanese, and who cannot be regarded as (d-1)
- (e) Enrolled in ethnic (mainly Brazilian) schools and is able to pay the whole tuition fee, and would like to study Japanese
- (f-2) Under the compulsory schooling age and does not fall under category (f-1)

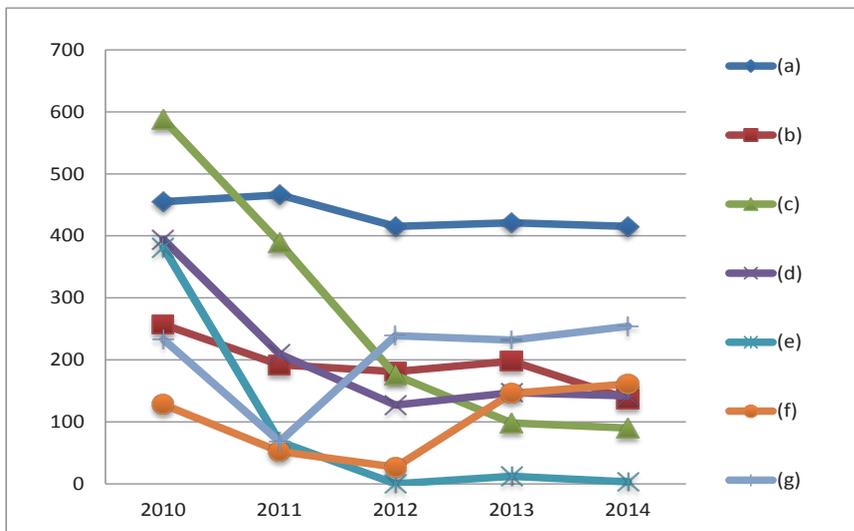
[Chart 1] The numbers of contracts and participants in Bridge Schools per year

	Number of contracts	Number of participants
2009	34	1,251
2010	42	2,436
2011	39	1,444
2012	23	1,164
2013	21	1,254
2014	22	1,202

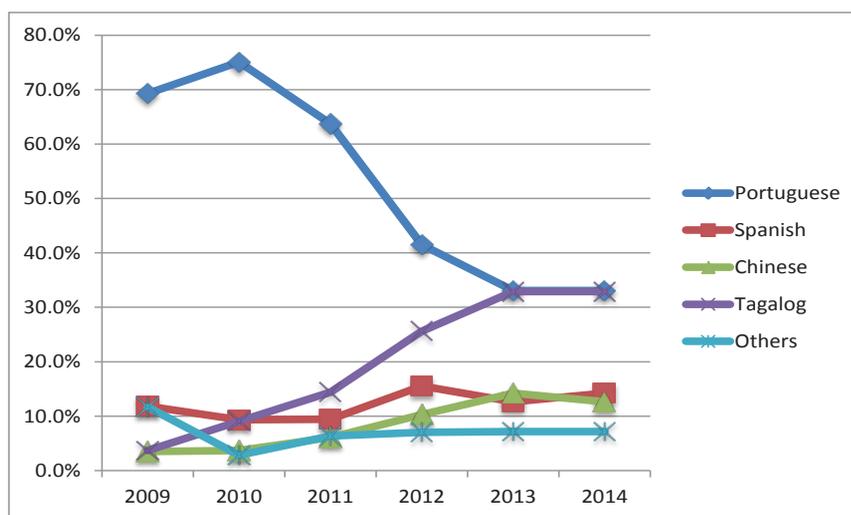
[Chart 2] The numbers of participants divided into Group A and Group B per year



[Chart 3] Participants divided into sub-categories per year



[Chart 4] Linguistic backgrounds of participants in Bridge Schools per year



With regard to the background of migrant children attending Bridge Schools, as shown in Chart 4, the ratio of Brazilian children decreased year by year, while that of Filipino children steadily increased. At the end of the Programme, Brazilian children and Filipino children both consisted of about 30% of the entire children population attending Bridge Schools. Also, cross-feature analyses on the linguistic background of the children revealed that (i) Tagalog-speaking children are the largest among the children out-of-school (compared to children speaking other languages) and (ii) Chinese-speaking children and Tagalog-speaking children occupy more than 60% of the children attending Bridge Schools who are beyond the compulsory-education age.

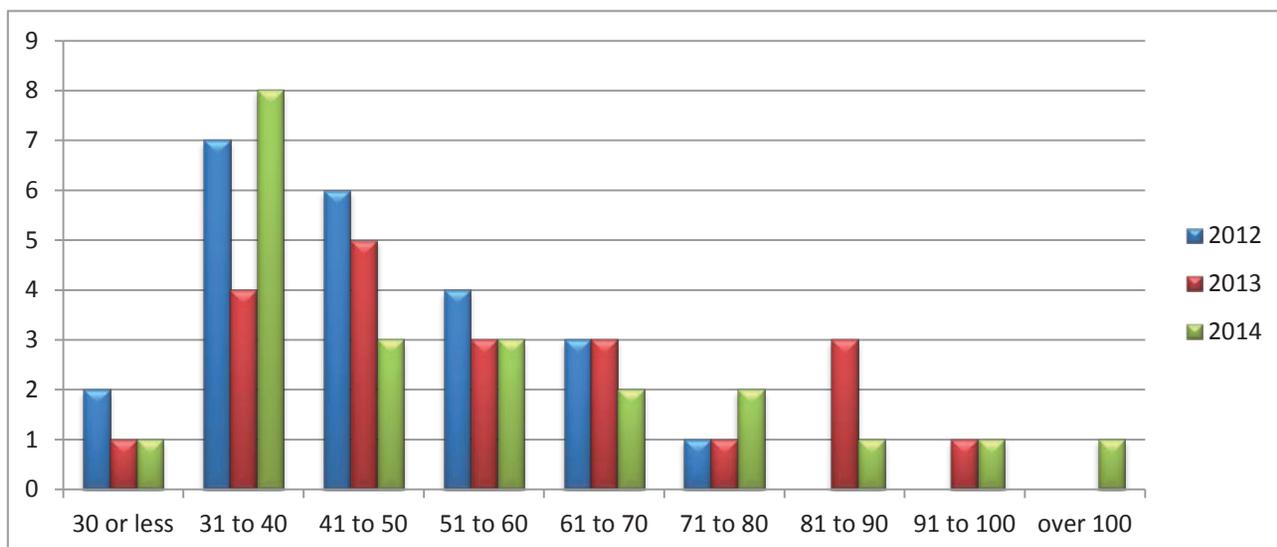
IV. Organisation of Classrooms and Classes

In principle, Bridge Schools were established for fulltime schooling, with classes conducted every day whole day from Monday to Friday. Some Bridge Schools however were open for morning or afternoon only, and school hours were shorter than Japanese public schools taking into account commuting hours and other personal or logistical constraints. Many Bridge Schools employed a flexible attendance policy, allowing some children to attend particular classes only, based upon the needs and circumstances of each child.

Some IPs ran more than one Bridge School with several classrooms in different locations, thus the number of classrooms was larger than that of IPs.

[CHART 5] below shows various sizes of Bridge Schools based upon the number of Group A (targeted) children attending Bridge Schools between 2012 and 2014. Presuming that each child “graduated” from a Bridge School exactly after six months, it would technically mean that about half of the children shown in Chart 5 attended Bridge Schools at any given time.

[CHART 5] Sizes of Bridge Schools based upon the number of “targeted children”



Migrant children attending Bridge Schools had a wide range of background in terms of language, age, ethnicity, and previous education. Policies of public schools as regards acceptance of migrant children also significantly vary from communities to communities. Therefore, the Secretariat (IOM) did not suggest a uniform curriculum for all Bridge Schools to follow. IPs knows very well local condition, thus were rather required to submit a general syllabus and schedule, reflecting various circumstances of their target children and peculiarities of their local communities.

Bridge Schools provided classes on Japanese language, regular subjects, mother tongues, and others (such as arts, physical exercise, music, cooking, etc.). Classes are conducted in various forms, including an all-in-one-go manner (regardless of grades), or division into small groups, or individual tutoring. Group lessons are useful in terms of preparing migrant children for the regular methodologies taken in public Japanese schools, while individual tutoring is effective in tailoring lessons for very different backgrounds, education levels, capacities and goals of individual migrant children. Particularly for such children who faced difficulties in Japanese and regular subjects, other classes such as music, arts and physical exercise were important for them to be able to show their stronger potentials. Also to respect their identity and promote self-confidence, some IPs provided lessons on their mother tongues. The curricula of teaching subjects were bound to significantly vary, depending upon their age, education backgrounds, and to which grade they are aiming at transferring to (e.g. entry at grade 1, or grade 7, or high-school level).

It was not made an absolute requirement for Japanese instructors (who also teach regular subjects) and bilingual instructors teaching at Bridge Schools to have official qualifications or certificates. Meanwhile, they were required to have sufficient relevant experience in assisting migrant children in a given community, so that they can effectively coordinate children’s transfer to public schools, as a bridge themselves.

The Bridge Schools not only taught Japanese and regular subjects, and prepared migrant children to transfer to Japanese public schools. They also made creative endeavours to help migrant children regaining self-confidence, finding their own strengths, removing negative images regarding

studies and schools, and providing a comfortable space to which migrant children can feel certain belongingness.

V. Other Activities

➤ “Bridge School Supporters”:

In order to present “role-models” for children attending Bridge Schools, some youth who have similar backgrounds and have gone through similar experiences but are now studying or working successfully in Japan were invited as “Bridge School Supporters”. They visited Bridge Schools and shared their life stories with migrant children, which inspired migrant children who could not envisage their success in Japan. Some IPs combined such visit with the making of “photo-stories” in which migrant children made their own history using photos and videos and for which Bridge School Supporters provide inputs and advice. It was deemed important and effective for young migrant children to interact with such role-models / Supporters to be stimulated and motivated with their studies and schooling.

➤ Organisation of Events, Extra-Curricular Activities and Interaction with Local Communities:

Japanese public schools hold various events such as a start-of-term ceremony, an end-of-term ceremony, sports day, and cultural days, etc. with a view to nurturing camaraderie among students and teaching the importance of achieving something through group activities. Similar events were held at Bridge Schools, which facilitated migrant children to have a sense of achievement, and contributed to better understanding from and communications with migrant parents and local stakeholders.

Particularly when migrant children are completely out-of-school and staying at home, their interactions with local communities are extremely limited. Some migrant children even didn't know their own home address, and never used nearby public facilities or public transportation, which significantly limits basic knowledge and life-skills to manage their daily life. To compensate such deficiency, some Bridge Schools organised various extra-curricular activities, such as trial use of local post offices, libraries, and public transportation. Likewise, some training sessions were conducted in terms of security and disaster preparedness in cooperation with local police and fire department. In particular, earthquake-preparedness training proved to be useful for migrant children coming from countries where there is no earthquake. Some public schools made special arrangements to allow migrant children attending Bridge Schools to experience school meals, as special guests. Furthermore, some Bridge Schools participated in local cultural festivals and local volunteer activities such as garbage picking and street-cleaning. This facilitated mutual understanding and better communications between migrant children and Japanese residents in the local communities. Through such community-based extra-curricular activities, some Bridge Schools have started realising what “migrant integration” actually means.

➤ Promotion of Transfer of Migrant Children to Formal Schools:

While Bridge Schools ensured to maintain a space for migrant children with education chal-

lenges, they also endeavoured to promote smooth transfer of such children to formal schooling. Schooling promotion started first with “discovery” of migrant children out-of-school; out-reach efforts to encourage such children to start and continue coming to Bridge Schools; and assessment of education background, personal circumstances and future goals/plans. Sometimes, Bridge Schools had to play a role as a “mediator” between migrant parents and local public schools, between migrants and local education boards, and even between migrant children and their parents (particularly in case of mixed-families). Some other challenges included the difficulties in discerning learning difficulties and developmental problems; the difficulties for migrant parents to plan their future; domestic problems within migrant families; lack of awareness of migrant parents on the education system of Japan, among others. It was important for IPs to identify such root causes and various factors contributing to schooling problems for an individual migrant child. After struggling to overcome these problems, the Bridge Schools tried to ensure smooth handover of each migrant child to a formal school and conducted monitoring and follow-up even after the transfer to a formal school, as necessary.

VI. Major Achievements

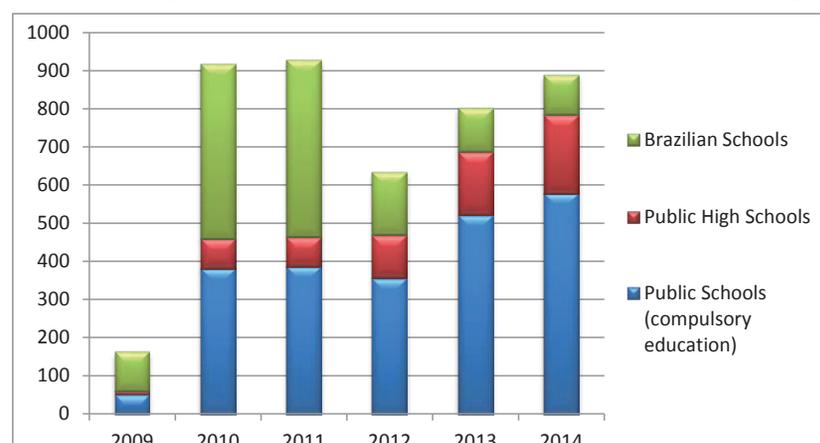
➤ Formal Schooling of Many Migrant Children:

Thanks to the variety of strenuous efforts made by the Bridge Schools as described above, a total of 4,333 migrant children managed to transfer to some kind of formal schooling after attending a Bridge School. The details are shown in Chart 6 and Chart 7.

[Chart 6] The numbers of migrant children who transferred to formal schooling

	Public Schools (compulsory education)	Public High Schools	Brazilian Schools	Total
2009	50	10	102	162
2010	381	79	457	917
2011	386	77	464	927
2012	355	113	167	635
2013	522	166	114	802
2014	578	207	105	890

[Chart 7] The numbers of migrant children who transferred to formal schooling



As for FY2009, it was the first implementation year in which most of the Bridge Schools were established in or after October, thus not many children managed to transfer to formal schools. During the second and third year (FY2010-2011), the category (c) children (mainly Brazilian children who were enrolled in a private ethnic school but unable to pay the whole tuition fee) were the largest among the children attending Bridge Schools. Given some economic recovery which enabled their parents to find employment, those Brazilian children managed to go back / enter the private / ethnic school during FY2010-2011. In reading these charts, it should be also noted that the number of Bridge Schools was halved for the second phase (FY2012-2014), that children above the schooling age were added to the “targeted children” from FY2012, as well as children below the schooling age from FY2014. These factors also influenced the trend of numbers of children transferred to formal schools, as shown in Chart 7.

There were other children who “graduated” Bridge Schools but did not enter any other school afterwards. Such children usually moved to a different municipality within Japan, or returned to their country of origin, or started working. The variety of destinations after Bridge Schools seems to epitomise the difficulties migrant children face in their life.

According to the follow-up reports submitted by some IPs, most of the “alumnae / alumni” of Bridge Schools managed to stay attending formal schools, although an entrance exam to high schools apparently still stands as a high hurdle for many migrant children, let alone graduation from high schools. It is a long-term challenge to properly identify to what extent migrant children should pursue schooling in which subject areas, depending upon their life plan and goal.

➤ Development of Local Mechanisms for Schooling Assistance to Migrant Children:

Given the urgency of establishment of places for out-of-school migrant children in 2009, not all IPs at the inception of the Programme had sufficient knowledge, expertise, or resources. Through trying to overcome various challenges as described above, a number of IPs evolved into local centres to assist schooling for migrant children. In other words, through various endeavours during the six years implementation, a certain system to assist and promote education of migrant children through multifaceted collaboration in a given local community started emerging, with the Bridge Schools as its hub. At the risk of over-simplification, the emerging system could be summarised as follows:

- (i) Discovery, disclosure and visualisation of the existence of schooling problems facing migrant children, as a public issue in a given community;
- (ii) Emergence of people and organisation who endeavour to tackle the problems;
- (iii) Local and regional network of these like-minded people and organisation;
- (iv) Development of human resources, expansion of knowledge and experience, improvement of methodologies, and growth as organisations;
- (v) Sharing of such awareness, resources, knowledge, experience and methodologies among various stakeholders in a given community; establishment of multifaceted cooperation mechanism; and
- (vi) Spill-over to other local communities.

VII. Conclusions and Ways Forward

A total of 8,751 migrant children participated in the Bridge Schools, out of whom 4,333 children were able to transfer successfully to Japanese public schools or other formal schools. In addition to this quantifiable achievement, the Bridge School Programme made two other noteworthy contributions. Firstly, the Bridge School Programme made schooling problems facing migrant children a public agenda. For instance, the sixth policy paper issued on 4th of March 2015 by the “Education Rebuilding Council” established under the Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, suggested that the central government and local municipalities shall promote measures to assist migrant children’s schooling by way of encouraging smooth acceptance by public schools, establishing Japanese language education tailor-made to individual migrant children, and implementing special curricula for children with needs for Japanese language education. And secondly, the Bridge School Programme contributed to the development of local networks and resources to assist migrant children’s education in given communities thus also facilitating their social integration.

The Bridge School Programme officially ended in March 2015. As a successor public measure, a new programme was launched by the MEXT from fiscal year 2015, in which local municipalities will take more direct lead in ensuring Japanese language and other regular subject education for migrant children in need and in facilitating such children’s transfer to formal schools, in cooperation with NPOs and other organisations with expertise in migrant children education. In addition, other measures will be continued and pursued, such as posting additional teachers to public schools with large number of migrant children and/or promoting Japanese language education and other assistance measures specifically for migrant children within public schools. It is hoped that such multi-faceted measures taken by the central government as well as local municipalities will further facilitate schooling of migrant children in Japan.

END