



JAPAN RAISES THE AGE OF SEXUAL CONSENT TO 16 FROM 13 - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Photo: Japanese lawmakers stand as they approve an amended criminal law at the upper house in Tokyo

Japan's parliament on Friday raised the age of sexual consent to 16 from 13, a limit which had remained unchanged for more than a century and was among the world's lowest, amid calls for greater protection of children and women.

The revision was part of a revamping of laws related to sex crimes. Separately, Parliament passed a new law on Friday to increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues which activists criticized for not guaranteeing equal rights for sexual minorities.

Reforms providing greater protection for victims of sexual crimes and stricter punishment of assailants have come slowly in a country where the legislative and judicial branches have long been dominated by men.

Japan in 2017 revised its criminal code on sexual crimes for the first time in 110 years. A series of acquittals in cases of sexual abuse and growing instances of sexual images taken of girls and women without their consent have triggered public outrage, prompting the new revisions.

The changes enacted Friday make sexual intercourse with someone below age 16 considered rape. They specify eight scenarios of "consentless sex crimes," a new term for forced sexual intercourse, including being assaulted under the influence of alcohol or drugs, fear, or intimidation.

They also ban the filming, distribution and possession of sexually exploitative images taken without consent.

The statute of limitations for sex crimes was also extended by five years, to 10 years for consentless sexual intercourse. That crime is now subject to up to 15 years in prison, while "photo voyeurism" can be punished by up to three years' imprisonment.

The changes were sparked in part by a case in Nagoya in which a father who raped his 19-year-old daughter was acquitted by a court which ruled that while the daughter did not give her consent, she did not resist violently. The decision prompted nationwide protests.

Activists said the new LGBTQ+ law threatens them instead of promoting equality because of last-minute changes which apparently catered to opponents of transgender rights.

Japan is the only member of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations which does not have LGBTQ+ legal protections. Support for

same-sex marriage and other rights has grown among the Japanese public, but opposition remains strong within the governing Liberal Democratic Party, known for conservative values and a reluctance to promote gender equality and sexual diversity.

The final version of the law states that "unjust discrimination" is unacceptable but doesn't clearly ban discrimination.

It says that conditions should be created so that "all citizens can live with peace of mind," which activists say shows the governing party prioritized the concerns of opponents of equal rights over the rights of sexual minorities.

"The law does not look at us or our ordeals, and instead looks to the direction of those causing us pain," said Minori Tokieda, a transgender woman. "I'm deeply concerned about how the law treats us as if our presence threatens the people's sense of safety."