

Gender Equality in Iceland

Recent Achievements

- In 2018**, ACT on equal status and equal rights irrespective of race or national origin
- In 2019**, the Directorate of Equality received a grant for a nation wide operation against domestic violence
- In 2019**, the Parliament approved laws regarding gender autonomy that provides people the right to define themselves
- In 2019**, the Parliament approved laws that ensures womens autonomy of their own body and permitted abortion until the 22 week of pregnancy
- In 2020**, the Parliament approved laws that require companies to either obtain an Equal Pay certification or an Equal Pay confirmation
- In 2020**, the Parliament approved laws on equal status and equal rights irrespective of gender
- In 2021**, parental leave was increased to twelve months

Steppingstones

- 1850 Equal inheritance rights for men and women
- 1882 Widows and single women gain local suffrage
- 1886 Girls can enter secondary school
- 1900 Married women gain the right to control their income and personal property
- 1907 Icelandic Women's Rights Association founded
- 1908 Women gain local suffrage and the right to hold local office
- 1908 The first women's list participates in local elections in Reykjavik
- 1911 Women get equal rights to grants, study and civil service
- 1914 First women workers' association founded
- 1915 Women over the age of 40 gain national suffrage and the right to hold office
- 1920 All women gain national suffrage and the right to hold office
- 1921 New marital law guarantees equality for spouses
- 1922 The first woman elected to the Icelandic Parliament, from a women's list
- 1926 The first Icelandic woman defends a doctoral thesis
- 1957 The first female mayor in an Icelandic municipality
- 1961 Equal Pay Act
- 1970 First female Cabinet Minister
- 1975 Women nationwide take a day off on October 24
- 1976 The first Gender Equality Act and the Gender Equality Council is founded
- 1980 The first nationally elected female president in the world
- 1982 The Women's Alliance runs for the first time in local elections
- 1983 The Women's Alliance runs in parliamentary elections for the first time
- 1995 Equal rights of women and men stated in the constitution
- 1997 Fathers get an independent right to two weeks paid parental leave
- 2003 Fathers get an independent right to three months of paid parental leave
- 2005 Women take part of October 24 off
- 2009 The first female prime minister in Iceland
- 2009 The first government with equal number of men and women
- 2009 Legislation banning the purchasing of prostitution is approved by parliament
- 2010 A full ban on strip clubs approved by parliament
- 2010 A law on gender quota on company boards
- 2010 A single marriage act is approved
- 2011 Legislation permits removal of perpetrator of domestic violence from domicile
- 2011 A law on gender quota on boards of Pension Funds
- 2017 Equal pay certification legalised
- 2018 Equal treatment act regardless of race and ethnic origin
- 2019 Law on Gender Autonomy
- 2019 Abortion laws amended to ensure women's bodily autonomy
- 2021 Parental leave is increased to 12 months, both parents are warranted the same time

History

Politics: Local Government. Women gained local suffrage and the right to hold local office in 1908. The same year, four women were elected to the city council in Reykjavík. In 1958 women were only 1% of all council members in Iceland. A women's list participated in the municipal elections in Reykjavík and Akureyri in 1982, and women's participation went from 4% to 13% of all council members in the country. In 1994 women held a quarter of all council seats and in 2002 they held a third. After the elections in 2018 women are 47% of all council members.

Womans strike. On October 24, 1975, many women in Iceland took a day off to emphasize the importance of women's contribution, both in paid and unpaid work. Around 25 thousand women gathered in downtown Reykjavík, and many women also met in other parts of the country. On October 24, 2005, Icelandic women left work at 14:08, which was the estimated time when women had earned their pay – based on women's pay as a percentage of men's pay. Close to 50 thousand people went to a rally in downtown Reykjavík, mostly women, which is around one third of all Icelandic women. This is the largest meeting in Icelandic history to date.

First Nationally elected Female President. The fourth President of the Republic of Iceland was Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. She was elected in 1980 and stepped down in 1996 after four terms in office. Vigdís was the first woman in the world to be democratically elected Head of State. She is an important role model for Icelanders of all ages and remains active in public life.

The Womans Alliance. Kvennalistinn, was founded in 1983. Its main objectives were women's liberation and the increased representation of women in politics. When the Women's Alliance began, women were only 5% of MPs, but after the first election the party participated in this number rose to 15%. In 1999 the 16-year history of the original movement ended when the members of the Women's Alliance became members of different political parties.

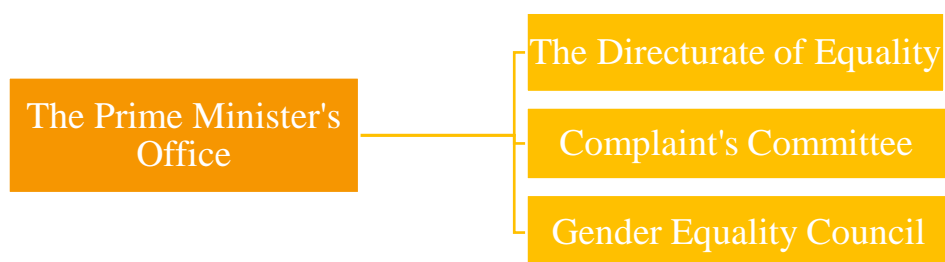
The Organization of Gender Equality Work in Iceland

The current legislation on Gender Equality is the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights irrespective of gender no. 150/2020. The aim of the law is to counteract discrimination based on gender and to uphold equality and equal opportunities of all genders in society and thus promote gender equality in all spheres of society. All individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and to develop their skills irrespective of gender.

This aim shall be reached by;

- Gender mainstreaming in all spheres of the society
- Working towards equal influence of women and men in decision making and policymaking in the society
- Working against wage discrimination and other forms of gender based discrimination on the employment market
- Increasing research in gender studies
- Enabling both women and men to reconcile their work and family life
- Increasing education and raise awareness on gender equality
- Analysing statistics according to gender
- Working against gender-based violence and harassment
- Changing traditional gender images and working against negative stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men

Prime Minister's Office oversees the implementation of the Gender Equality Act, but the Directorate of Equality is responsible for its administration according to act no. 151/2020 on Administration of Matters Concerning Equality. The Prime Minister's Office appoints a Gender Equality Council and a Complaints Committee on Gender Equality. Within the Ministry, a special department oversees Gender Equality.



The Directorate of Equality, The Gender Equality Council and the Complaints Committee operate independently of each other. The Directorate of Equality provides counseling and education in the field of gender Equality while the Gender Equality Complaints Committee examines cases and to deliver a ruling in writing on whether provisions of this Act No. 150/2020 have been violated. The Committee's ruling may not be referred to a higher authority. In cases that may be expected to influence policy on the labour market, the Committee shall seek comments from the national federations of workers and employees before delivering its ruling. The rulings of the Complaints Committee shall be binding for the parties to each case. The parties may refer the Committee's rulings to the courts.

Government Policies and Gender Equality Issues

Plan of Action on Gender Equality. The parliament approved a Plan of Action on Gender Equality, effective for a period of four years. The plan is divided into thematic areas including government, the labour market, reconciliation of work and family life, the gender pay gap, political representation, gender-based violence, education, international cooperation and engaging men in gender equality work. This is to ensure that all ministries are made responsible for projects or actions within their policy areas.

A five-year plan on gendered budgeting, was introduced for the years 2019-2023. The main objectives in gendered budgeting is that policy making in public finances should guard that obtaining and distribution of public finance can influence the status of the sexes and equality. Emphasis is put on gendered economic management and budgeting that promotes both economic equality, fairness and general welfare.

Laws to counteract human trafficking. In 2021 new laws were approved that change an article in the General Penal Code. In the laws an emphasis is on protection of victims of human trafficking, especially women and children that are sold in prostitution or have been sexually abused. An emphasis is also put on individuals that have been labour trafficked and other use of people in bad situation with forced labour, forced service and/or slavery.

Parental Leave. The Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave, from the year 2021, provides parents with twelve months paid parental leave. Parents are allotted six months each with six weeks allowed to be shared with another parent. The stated aim is twofold; to ensure that children receive care from both parents and to enable both women and men to coordinate family life and work outside the home.

The Minister of health launched a health clinic for women. In 2021 an experimental project was launched, a special health clinic service for women. The goal of the service is to target women's health but there have been indicators of the healthcare system not being equipped to help women to the degree that it should. The women's clinic will service illnesses that are specifically found in women and there will also be information available about birth control and advisors will be on site for victims of violence.

Plan of Action on Domestic and Sexual Violence. In 2019 the Directorate of Equality received a grant from the European Union to finance the project Building bridges, tearing down walls – a cooperation in domestic violence affairs. The main focus of the project was to mediate experiences of methods that have shown progress in the battle against violence in close relationships, to form connections, to offer education and information and to provoke enlightenment in the community. The enlightenment bore the name; you have HOPE. This was not a new service but an effort to strengthen services that were already in place and to further knowledge and skills of professionals in analysing violence. There was also a focus on making those services visible in the community. The project was nationwide but split into sectors and the approach of the National commissioner in domestic violence was the base of the cooperation between professionals in each sector. Special emphasis was put on fragile groups, which according to research are foreign women, women with disabilities and women who are expecting a child.

Gender Equality in the Labour Market. Iceland had one of the highest rate of women's labour force participation among OECD countries in 2018. Despite of this gender segregation of the labour market remains persistent. The government has sought ways to raise awareness among employers and those active on the labour market regarding means to reduce gender-based differences in career choices, the aim being to break down gender barriers. These plans coincide with actions intended to bridge the gender pay gap.

The Gender Pay Gap. In 2020 the Government passed an amendment to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men. In 2017 it was made mandatory for all firms and institutions with 25 or more employees to obtain a Pay Equality Certification but in the new amendment it is also possible to obtain a Pay Equality Confirmation. Now companies with 25-49 employees can choose to go either the certification route or the confirmation route. This process will be overseen by the Directorate of Equality.

Gender Based Violence - Sexual Offences. Among improvements introduced into the General Penal code in 2007 was a broadening of the definition of "rape", which now includes other forms of sexual coercion and the exploitation of the victim's mental condition or inability to resist the action or to realise its significance. Permission is made for heavier punishments, firstly, if the victim is a child under the age of 18, secondly if the violence committed by the perpetrator is of major severity, and thirdly if the offence is committed in a way that inflicts particularly serious pain or injury.

National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security. In 2018 Iceland's third National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security has been published. The National Action Plan sets forth the objectives of the Icelandic government which are to be achieved in 2018-2022. A steering group, guided by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, has been given the task of implementing the National Action Plan

Gender in Education The Gender Equality Act, states that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science shall monitor compliance with gender equality in schools and educational institutions, including sports and leisure activities. The Ministry issues the National Curriculum for pre-schools, junior schools and senior schools. Among six pillars that are to underpin all education one stands for equality. The equality pillar comprises several factors: age, class, culture, descent, gender, disability, language, nationality, outlook on life, race, religion, residence, sexual orientation. The Directorate of Equality works with schools to facilitate the implementation of gender equality education and gender equality action plans.

Gender and Climate Change. The Icelandic Government has for many years stressed the importance of gender in dealing with climate change, knowing that climate change affects women and men in a different way and that women and men affect the climate differently with their daily activities. Gender must be taken into consideration in negotiations about future climate policies and women must be represented in negotiations as well as in decision making all over the world. The Icelandic Government is determined to continue its work on securing that gender and climate change will receive the attention it deserves.

Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons. Since 1996 discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation are subject to punishment under the General Penal Code. The same year registered partnership between same-sex couples was given the same legal status as marriage, apart from certain limitations regarding adoptions. In 2010 this difference between marriages and registered partnerships was abolished, and the Marriage Act now applies to both heterosexual and same-sex couples. In recent years, the need to improve the situation of transgender persons in Iceland has been emphasised resulting in a new legislation on the rights of transgender persons to sex reassignment surgery.

Interesting Links

The Directorate of Equality

www.jafnretti.is/en

Prime Minister's Office

www.government.is/ministries/prime-ministers-office/

Statistics Iceland

www.statice.is

RIKK, Center for Women's and Gender Research, University of Iceland

<http://mark.hi.is/home>

NIKK, Nordic information on Gender

www.nikk.no/



Jafnréttisstofa