



## 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 Reykjavik. In 1958 women were only 1% of all council members in Iceland. A women's list participated in the municipal elections in Reykjavik 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

**Women's Strike.** On October 24, 1975, a large number of the 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 Reykjavik, 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 Reykjavik, 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 Women's Alliance.** Kvinnalístinn, 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.

## Interesting Links

The Directorate of Equality  
[www.gender.is](http://www.gender.is)

Prime Minister's Office  
[www.government.is/ministries/prime-ministers-office/](http://www.government.is/ministries/prime-ministers-office/)

Statistics Iceland  
[www.statice.is](http://www.statice.is)

RIKK, Centre for Women's and Gender Research, University of Iceland  
<https://rikk.hi.is/>

MARK, The Centre for Diversity and Gender Studies  
<http://mark.hi.is/home>

NIKK, Nordic information on Gender  
[www.nikk.no/](http://www.nikk.no/)

## Stepping stones:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 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  |
| 1926 | The first Icelandic woman defends a doctoral thesis  |
| 1957 | The first female mayor in an Icelandic municipality  |
| 1961 | Equal Pay Act approved by parliament   |
| 1970 | First female Cabinet Minister  |
| 1975 | Women nationwide take a day off on October 24th  |
| 1976 | The first Gender Equality Act and the Gender Equality Council is appointed   |
| 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  |
| 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   |
| 2018 | Act on equal treatment of individuals in the labor market regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, philosophy of life, disability, impaired working capacity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender identity or sexual expression |

# Gender Equality in Iceland

Iceland has topped the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index in previous years. The main reasons are women's political participation, high level of education and equal access to health care. Women are 38% of the parliamentarians after elections in 2017 and 47% of the members of governing bodies of municipalities are women. Challenges ahead include promoting equality in leadership positions in politics and business, dismantling a gender segregated labour market and bridging the gender pay gap.

## Recent Achievements

In 2008 the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (The Gender Equality Act) was amended and for the first time an article on quotas was included. It stipulates that when appointments are made to national and local government committees, councils and boards, care shall be taken to ensure as equal representation of men and women as possible, and not lower than 40% when there are more than three representatives in a body. The law on gender quota also applies to the compositions of the boards of Pension Funds in Iceland.

In 2009 the purchasing of prostitution was made punishable by law, through changes in the General Penal Code. It is illegal to advertise and to benefit from prostitution, e.g. through pimping and other means. In 2010, a full ban on strip clubs was enacted, banning profiting from nudity.

In 2010 amendments to the Acts on Public Limited Companies and Private Limited Companies, requires companies with more than 50 employees to have both women and men on their company boards and if the board members are more than three, the percentage can not be under 40%. These changes took effect in September 2013.

In 2011 the parliament approved a law that expands provisions that authorities have to protect victims of violence in close relationships. The legislation permits the removal of the party accused of domestic violence from the household and putting in place a specific restraining order should there be suspicion of domestic violence.

In 2017 the Parliament passed an amendment to the 2008 Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, making it mandatory for all firms and institutions with 25 or more employees to obtain a Pay Equality Certification.





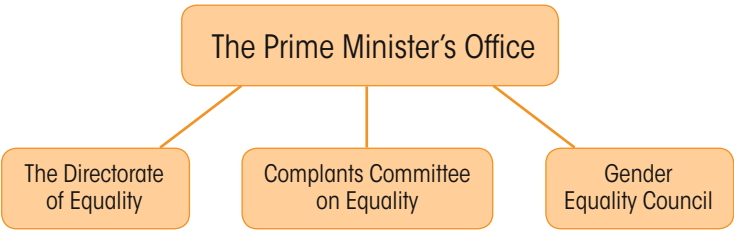
# The Organization of Gender Equality Work in Iceland

The current legislation on Gender Equality is the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men no. 10/2008. The aim of the Act is to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, 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 policy-making in the society
- Working against wage discrimination and other forms of gender based discrimination on the employment market
- Enabling both women and men to reconcile their work and family life
- Increasing education and awareness-raising on gender equality
- Analysing statistics according to gender
- Increasing research in gender studies
- 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 is in charge of the implementation of the Gender Equality Act, but the Directorate of Equality is responsible for its administration. Prime Minister's Office appoints a Gender Equality Council and a Complaints Committee on Gender Equality. Within the Ministry, a special department is in charge of Gender Equality.



The Directorate of Equality, the Gender Equality Council and the Complaints Committee operate independently of each other. The Directorate of Equality provides counselling and education in the field of gender equality. The Directorate of Equality also helps, when needed, with preparing complaints for the Complaints Committee. The task of the Gender Equality Complaints Committee shall be to examine cases and to deliver a ruling in writing on whether provisions of this Act no. 10/2008 have been violated. The Committee's rulings 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 approves 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.

**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 Responsive Budgeting.** In 2009 the Minister of Finance appointed a working group on gender responsive budgeting. In order to raise awareness of the public sector, the ministry has held training seminars and published two handbooks in cooperation with the Directorate of Equality. In 2014 all ministries had concluded pilot projects in their policy areas using the methodology of gender-responsive budgeting. In 2016 a new organic budget law was passed and Gender Budgeting became legally binding. The Budget Bill shall outline its effects on gender equality. The focus is on integrating gender budgeting into the budget cycle which includes the decisionmaking process. It is to ensure that the gender perspective is taken into account before decisions are made.

**Action Plan Against Human Trafficking.** In 2009 the Government approved the first Action Plan Against Human Trafficking. The objective of the action plan is to enhance the coordination of actions that are necessary in order to prevent human trafficking in Iceland, and to further study trafficking in human beings. Furthermore, it specifies actions that will ensure education and work to prevent trafficking in human beings, as well as securing aid and protection for victims.

**Plan of Action on Domestic and Sexual Violence.** In 2006 the Government launched its first action plan containing 37 actions to fight sexual and domestic violence. The objective of the plan was to combat violence in close relationships and sexual violence directed towards women and children as well as to improve services for victims of violence and those at risk. The Ministry of Welfare presented in 2011 a final report on the plan of action and its results, which were followed up with numerous activities. Work within the field continues to highlight the importance of cooperative work at all levels of society, awareness raising and education both for the public and those working with matters of domestic and sexual violence.

**Parental Leave.** The Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave, from the year 2000, provides parents with nine months paid parental leave. Fathers are allotted three months, mothers three and the remaining three months are divided between the two. 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. Initially the leave provided parents, who had been working full time, with 80% of their salary. Research has shown that, as a result of the legislation, fathers are building closer relationships with their children and women and men are on a more equal footing in the workplace.



**Gender Equality in the Labour Market.** Iceland has the highest rate of women's labour force participation among OECD countries. 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 2017 the Government passed an amendment to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, making it mandatory for all firms and institutions with 25 or more employees to obtain a Pay Equality Certification. The new provision went into force in January 2018. The required certification is based on the ISO "Equal pay management system - Requirements and guidance". Professional certifiers, such as private consultancy firms, shall deliver their verdict, with a report for each case certified, to 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.

**Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons.** Since 1996 discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is 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.

**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.