

1. Introduction

A. General remarks on Iceland's UPR follow-up: institutional responsibility and organisation work

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is an important tool to prompt, support and expand the promotion and protection of human rights in the UN Member States. It plays an important role in the efforts to ensure that human rights are observed in practice. This report is the second UPR report Iceland has conducted, and gives account of Iceland's follow-up on the recommendations from the previous review, as well as its efforts to address key human rights challenges in Iceland today.

Iceland's first review in the Human Rights Council took place in 2011 and resulted in 84 recommendations. Only four recommendations were rejected. The remaining 80 recommendations were either accepted, partially accepted or Iceland voluntarily pledged to examine them further.

B. Methodology and consultation process

The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for coordinating Iceland's efforts to follow-up the UPR recommendations in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Welfare. In preparation for this report the Icelandic authorities consulted with various civil society actors and organizations, who were invited to make suggestions or to comment on the work of this report. In early June an open meeting was organized on behalf of Iceland's UPR team, where the report was introduced and guests were invited to discuss freely the status of human rights in Iceland, and make comments and suggestions on what topics should be emphasized in the report. The results have greatly benefitted the work of this report.

The civil society actors and organizations who participated in the process do not necessarily endorse the content of this report.

C. Recent developments

In 2008 Iceland was hit by the international financial crisis, which resulted in the largest protests in the history of Iceland. In the following years cuts had to be made to the state budget, especially the health care, social system and educational system as they are the biggest items of expenditure. In recent years the economy in Iceland has grown again considerably and the state of the economy is now comparable to the years before the financial crisis. Unemployment has been decreasing since. More funding is now provided to the health care and social system, and the building of new hospital is being prepared in relation to a national action plan on improving the health care system.

In May 2016 Althingi, the Icelandic parliament, adopted a legislation which entails considerable judicial reform in Iceland. At present there are only two instances of court, district courts and a Supreme Court. According to the new legislation a court of appeal will be established. Under the new system, two instances of court will be able to hear statements of witnesses and defendants, which has generally not been the case under the current system, at times raising an issue under Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights. Moreover, the new court will help ease the growing workload on the

Supreme Court, which will lead to a strengthening of the judicial system as a whole. The new judicial system will come into force in the beginning of 2018.

2. Human rights protection in Iceland

A. The Icelandic Constitution

Iceland is a representative democracy and a parliamentary republic. The Icelandic Constitution provides that state power is exercised by the Parliament (Althingi), the President of Iceland, the Government and the Judiciary. The Parliament and the President exercise the legislative power jointly, while the President and the Government exercise executive power. Judges are vested with the exercise of judicial power.

The Icelandic Constitution guarantees certain human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of religion, freedom from interference with privacy, home and family life and freedom of association and assembly.

The Constitutional Act of 1995 brought fundamental amendments to the human rights provisions of the Constitution. It added a multitude of new human rights provisions to the Constitution and older provisions were rephrased and modernised. The provisions remain unchanged since their addition to the Constitution.

When Iceland's first review in the Human Rights Council took place in 2011, the Icelandic Constitution was under revision. The propositions for an amended Constitution were presented to Althingi in July 2011 and a non-binding referendum was held in 2012 where the majority of voters wanted the propositions to be the foundation for a new Constitution

The government, which was elected in 2013, set up a committee of experts to revise a part of the Icelandic Constitution based on previous work. Three propositions were presented to Althingi in February 2016 regarding the 1) use of national resources, 2) the environment and nature, and 3) the conditions for referendums on certain laws passed by Althingi. These propositions are currently under review.

B. International human rights conventions

Iceland has acceded to the following UN human rights conventions: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Iceland has ratified all the optional protocols to these conventions except for the optional protocols to the ICESCR, CAT and the third optional protocol to the CRC (communication procedure). The CRC has also incorporated into Icelandic law.

Iceland regularly submits periodical reports to the relevant UN treaty bodies on Iceland's implementation of its international human rights obligations. Iceland takes the recommendations issued by UN treaty bodies seriously and carries out a thorough review and follow-up of the recommendations set out in their concluding remarks. Iceland has issued a standing invitation to the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Iceland has ratified a number of ILO Conventions, including the eight key conventions. Iceland has also ratified a number of international humanitarian law conventions, including the four Geneva Conventions from 1949 and their Protocols from 1977.

Iceland is a member of the Council of Europe and has ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and most of its protocols. Iceland has also ratified a number of Council of Europe human rights conventions, most recently the Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. By ratifying the ECHR, Iceland has undertaken to comply with the judgments issued by the European Court of Human Rights in cases brought against Iceland. Judgments against Iceland have prompted the payment of compensation to applicants, and in some instances amendments to Icelandic legislation. The ECHR has been incorporated, as a whole, into Icelandic law.

As a participating state of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Iceland fully adheres to and complies with the commitments of the OSCE's three dimensions: the politico-military dimension; the human dimension; and the economic and environmental dimension.

Iceland has also ratified the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Icelandic law is based on a dualistic system, whereby international conventions ratified by Iceland must be incorporated into national legislation through legal amendments. In the Icelandic legal system, stipulations in international agreements cannot be directly applied to individuals or entities without implementing legislation. However, existing laws must be interpreted in accordance with international law, both customary law and international agreements.

C. National human rights institutions

The Icelandic Human Rights Center (ICEHR) was established in 1994 and serves as Icelandic's national human rights institution. It is an independent organization, whose role is to advance human rights in Iceland through promotion of research and education, as well as raising awareness of human rights. The ICEHR also serves a monitoring role and has, ever since its establishment commented on numerous legislative proposals and public policy and provided information to international monitoring bodies on the state of human rights in Iceland. However, due to ICEHR status, among other things its funding which it receives directly from several ministries on a contractual basis, it does not comply with the Paris Principles.

A national action plan on human rights was presented to Althingi in 2013, but was not formally adopted. Nevertheless, the work of the authorities in this field is guided by the preparatory work and the main underlying principles of the action plan. One of the main objects is to establish a national human rights institution based on the Paris Principles. The process is already under way and a legislative proposal will be published shortly on the homepage of the Ministry of the Interior for comments. The proposal will be submitted to the parliament this year and if it will be accepted the NHRI can be operational from the beginning of next year.

3. Human rights implementation in Iceland, best practices and challenges

1. Introduction

Democracy and human rights are safeguarded in chapter I and VII respectively of the Icelandic Constitution, and are the key elements of the Icelandic value base. Iceland's long term objective is to ensure that universal human rights and fundamental freedoms become a reality for everyone in Iceland as is stated in Art. 65 of the Icelandic Constitution.

2. Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

1. General remarks

Iceland has not adopted a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. However, according to the abovementioned Art. 65 of the Icelandic Constitution, everyone shall be equal before the law and enjoy human rights irrespective of gender, religion, opinion, national origin, race, colour, property, birth or other status and men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects. All laws and regulations are to be construed in accordance with the Article. Moreover, various legal acts contain provisions which prohibit discrimination, such as regarding gender equality, the rights of patients to health services, the rights of persons with disabilities etc. Furthermore, work is under way at the Ministry of Welfare on law proposals on discrimination covering all spheres of society, among other things to comply with relevant EU directives.

2. Gender Equality

The year 2016 marks the 40th anniversary of the first legislation on gender equality in Iceland. Iceland is regularly named as one of the highest ranking countries in the world when it comes to gender equality. Still, gender equality challenges persist in certain sectors of the society.

Since the first UPR review in 2011, a variety of initiatives to combat gender inequality have been implemented. Among those are amendments to the Gender Equality Act to accelerate progress on gender equality and give men and women equal opportunities, such as minimum gender quota of 40% on governmental committees, councils and boards of public companies who have more than three members and employees of 50 or more. The amendments have also included a new definition of discrimination, a ban on wage secrecy and a clause stating that all public statistics on individuals should be disaggregated by gender.

According to a parliamentary resolution from June 2015, an equal opportunity fund was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare. The aim is to fund projects or research which promote gender equality nationally and internationally. According to the resolution, the fund will receive 100 million Icelandic Krona annually for the next five year.

The Government has also been promoting women's rights under UN Women's HeforShe IMPACT 10x10x10 initiative, whereby it has committed to closing the gender pay gap by 2022, achieving gender parity in the media by 2020 and engaging men and boys in Iceland in achieving gender equality.

Pay gap

In 2012 the Ministry of Welfare issued the Equal Pay Systems Standard, which is a management standard and as such comparable with other management standards. It is a managerial tool which enables undertakings and institutions to adopt procedures that ensure that equal remuneration is paid for equal work or work of equal value. This is the first standard of its kind in Iceland, and was at first set up as an experimental project before it was adopted. This is an important step towards fulfilling the government's commitment to eliminate the gender pay gap before 2022.

A Governmental Action Group published a report in 2015 which showed that the gender pay gap was 7,6%. Icelandic authorities continue to work towards reducing the pay gap between men and women. The Action Group is to submit two plans of action which are designed to reduce the gender pay gap. Firstly a plan of action on the integration of family and working life and secondly a plan of action on ways of breaking up gender-based choices in education and careers. The Action Group's mandate expires in December 2016.

Gender equality in the judicial system, the law enforcement and diplomacy

The Equal Status Act applies to the appointment of judges at the district and Supreme Courts. The number of judges at the Supreme Court are ten, eight men and two women. One of the female judges holds a permanent seat on the Supreme Court but the other one is temporarily appointed. A special committee is in charge of evaluating the qualification of judicial candidates according to the Act on the Judiciary. The interpretation of the applicability of the Act on Gender Equality to the committee has been disputed, but among the changes to the abovementioned judicial reform were changes to the provisions on the assessment committee, to eliminate any contradictory interpretations. Both genders shall be represented in the committee at all times.

An action plan is currently being prepared within the police departments around Iceland to promote professional development of female police officers, with the aim to increase and promote their representation in police administration. The National Police Commissioner is currently implementing an action plan to increase and promote the representation of female police officers in the police administration. The National Police Academy has in recent years placed special emphasis on recruiting more women. According to recent legislative changes, police education has been moved to university level. with the aim to increase the quality of police education and to improve its capacities to meet the requirements of public security.

Over the last decade, conscious efforts have been made to achieve a greater gender balance in Iceland's diplomatic corps with some success. The number of female Ambassadors has increased twofold, with women holding almost 30% of positions now compared to around 15% in 2006. Other female diplomats now hold 39% of positions compared to 33% a decade ago.

3. Ethnic discrimination and racism

In recent years the Icelandic Integration Development Fund has emphasized funding projects and research that aim at combatting ethnic discrimination and racism and strengthen NGO's which are working with immigrants. In 2012 a research on racism and other discrimination towards immigrants in Iceland showed that 93% of participants had

been subjected to indirect racism in the two weeks leading up to the research. In 2014 another research showed that 72% of participants had experienced racism or prejudice. Furthermore the Ministry of Welfare in co-operation with the Integration Council launched a TV campaign, *Without prejudice*, where the aim was to raise awareness against discrimination against immigrants. The Icelandic Government continues to fund research on racism and discrimination in Iceland in keeping with the policy to eliminate any form of discrimination.

The Football Association in Iceland has, as the biggest sporting association in the country, in recent years implemented a project called Football – A Game Without Prejudice with the support of UEFA. The project is threefold and aims to eliminate the stigma of football in Iceland, preventing bullying and focus on the game integrity.

4. Rights of LGBTQIA

Iceland has demonstrated high social, political and legal standards in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity for many years. However, the Icelandic legislation does not contain provisions which explicitly prohibit discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics.

Intersex and Trans-people

There is no specialized legislation in place which protects the rights of intersex people in Iceland. A person's right to formally report medical misconduct to the Directorate General of Public Health is limited to ten years in Iceland. Consequently, intersex people who had interventions performed on them during childhood are left without clear options to seek redress within the Icelandic legal order.

In 2015 The Ombudsman for Children released a written opinion regarding surgical interventions performed on intersex children and stated that children should be allowed to make informed decisions about surgical or hormonal treatment when they have developed awareness of their own gender identity.

In 2012 Althingi passed a new Act regarding the legal status of individuals with identity disorder. The legislation contains provisions concerning the right of an individual to health care, the role of a medical team from the National Hospital in diagnosing and the treatment of such individuals. The main goal of the Act is to allow a person to get a confirmation that he or she belongs to the opposite gender. The practises relating to name-changes have been modified, and the Registers Iceland is allowed to change the registered name and sex of people upon requests. Certain conditions apply to trans people, as permits are required from a medical team and a legal committee of the Directorate of Health, as well as there is an official 18 month transition period.

The current legislation has no requirements for any specific standards of care for transgender persons in their transition process. The NQO has pointed out the importance of implementing such standards.

3. Immigrants and asylum seekers

1. Immigrants and integration

The goal of the Icelandic integration policy is to ensure that all residents of the country enjoy equal opportunities and are active participants in all aspects of society. Social

services, health care and education are provided on an equal basis to everyone registered in the country.

Immigration to Iceland has gradually increased in the recent years. In 2010, 6,8% of the population had an immigrant background, while in 2015 the rate was 10%, which include first and second generation of immigrants. Most immigrants to Iceland come from other EEA countries, such as Poland, Lithuania, Germany and Denmark. There is a very high participation of immigrants in the labour market in Iceland, or 84,2%, which is the highest in OECD countries.

The Ministry of Welfare published a report In May 2016 on immigrants in Iceland in accordance with Art. 8 of the Act on Immigration Issues for the first time. The report is to provide statistical information and major developments and trends in matters regarding immigration and intergration. At the same time, a comprehensive resolution, based on the Act on Immigration Issues, was put forth by Althingi regarding immigrants in Iceland. The resolution dictates a policy on immigrants in the years 2016-2019, which aims to further help immigrants to fully partipate in the Icelandic society and give special attention to the needs and protection, as well as promoting equal opportunities for immigrants. The policy is divided into the following five pillars which are prioritized by the Icelandic government: society, family, education, labour participation and refugees.

The Multicultural Centre provides information in eight languages for immigrants, including such matters as public administration, family affairs, education, rights and duties, finance and the health services. The Icelandic Human Rights Centre provides immigrants with free legal counselling under an agreement with the Ministry of Welfare. Some local authorities, e.g. Reykjavík City's Human Rights Office provides special services for immigrants regarding facilities and services provided by the city authorities, and in Akureyri (the largest town in Northern Iceland).

2. Immigrants and employment

The policy of the Icelandic authorities is to ensure that foreign citizens enjoy equal opportunities in the labour market. After the financial crisis in 2008 there was rising unemployment among immigrants. In recent years the unemployment rate has decreased. The aforementioned parliamentary resolution emphasizes that the number of immigrants in public offices corresponds with the demographics of society and to ensure that immigrants have access to the labour market in accordance with their educational level and professional experience.

3. Refugees and asylum-seekers

Iceland has seen a great increase in the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in recent months and years. 172 persons sought asylum in Iceland in 2012 and in 2015 the number of asylum-seekers was 354, out of which 96 were granted international protection. The number of asylum-seekers is expected to grow even larger by the end of this year.

The Icelandic government has been resettling quota refugees in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) since 1996, and has been accepting on average 20 persons every other year. Due to the growing number of refugees seeking international protection, the government decided to accept up to 100 persons in the years 2015 and 2016, which is an increase from previous years.

Iceland has prioritized certain groups of persons who are particularly vulnerable, mainly women and children at risk, LGBTQIA and persons with serious health problems. For instance, in January 2016 a group of 35 Syrian refugees came to Iceland as a part of Iceland's role in the UNHCR cooperation. The resettlement of quota-refugees is a co-operation between the State, a municipality and the Icelandic Red Cross. The parliamentary resolution from 2016 (see chapter 3.1 above) also dictates that a wide variety of institutions will assist refugees to resettle in Iceland in the best way possible. Refugees and asylum-seekers get necessary information on Icelandic society, such as information on job opportunities, housing, lessons in the Icelandic language and education. An agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the University of Iceland was signed in June 2016 regarding research on the issues of immigrants and asylum-seekers and their integration to Icelandic society, in order to gain further information about their status.

Various initiatives have been implemented to strengthen the position of refugees and asylum-seekers in recent years. According to the Act on Foreigners, the Directorate of Immigration handles all applications for residence permits, including those of asylum-seekers. In 2014 changes were made to the Act in order to further speed up the application process for refugees and asylum-seekers and a new independent appeals board was established. A new Act on Foreigners was passed by Alþingi in June 2016. It was prepared by representatives of all political parties who hold seats in parliament in close co-operation with the UNHCR. The new Act made some necessary amendments to the legislation in order to ensure compliance with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

In September 2015 the Prime Minister's Office established a committee of Ministers whose task was to coordinate the work of various ministries and organizations on the matters of refugees and asylum-seekers. The aim was to evaluate how Iceland can best contribute to reach the goals set for humanitarian aid and assisting refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants. Two billion Icelandic Krona were set for this purpose, mainly as a direct financial aid to international organizations, introducing refugees and asylum-seekers to Iceland as well as introducing initiatives to improve and speed up the application process in Iceland.

Iceland continues to work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the matters of assisted voluntary return of asylum-seekers and an agreement will be signed in order to further assist them to return back home as well as support them in their re-integration.

4. Rights of persons with disabilities

Iceland signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 30 March 2007. The Icelandic authorities and legislation is already mostly in compliance with the Convention and the ratification process is in the final stages. Extensive work has already taken place to analyse and prepare the process and several legislative changes have already been adopted. A new Act on the Affairs of Disabled People is being prepared, and will seek to fully incorporate the CRPD into Icelandic law. However, the Convention has regrettably still not been ratified which has led to serious criticism from international as well as domestic parties.

In June 2012 Althingi adopted an action plan regarding persons with disabilities. The Ministry of the Interior led, on the basis of this action plan, an inter-ministerial working group which was preparing the ratification of the CRPD. Each ministry analyzed the relevant legislative changes which were deemed necessary.

In 2011 Althingi passed the Act on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with disabilities as a part of the adoption of Art. 12 of the CRPD. The aim of the Act is to ensure disabled persons appropriate support in protecting their rights, to ensure respect for disabled persons' right of self-determination and, in cases where it is a matter of urgent necessity to intervene in their affairs, it will be done in full compliance with their rights. The Act contains provisions on a monitoring unit, rights protection officers and a personal spokesman who form a part of an assisted decision making mechanism. The Act also includes a system of measures to reduce compulsion in services to disabled persons.

A collaborator project implementing client controlled personal assistance has been in place since 2011. The project is an important resource for disabled people and ensures that the person can choose the kind of assistance and how and when it is provided. It is based on the ideology of independent living and freedom of action. A steering committee has overseen the project and published a manual, guidelines and agreement forms. The project is currently undergoing evaluation process and this form of service is expected to pass into legislation in 2016-2017.

Changes have also been made to the Electoral Act with regard to personal assistance in general elections, giving persons with disabilities the right to have a person of their choosing to assist them. In 2015 the Legal Capacity Act was amended making deprivation of legal competence only possible in cases of urgent necessity and where all other measures have failed, such as the use of a personal spokesman. The deprivation is always temporary and disability, addiction etc. can no longer be the sole grounds for deprivation of legal competence.

The Ministry of Welfare employs rights protection officers for disabled people all around the country who play a crucial role in safeguarding and upholding the rights of disabled people. They have co-operated with the police on cases of violence against disabled people with very good results and this work will continue.

The abovementioned measures entail important and necessary steps towards greater compliance with the CRPD and the Icelandic Government intends to finalise the ratification before the end of this year.

5. Rights of elderly persons

Since the first UPR review in 2011, Iceland has endeavoured to promote the rights of elderly persons and several initiatives have been introduced for that purpose. A part of the Icelandic government policy in matters of elderly persons is to design and build nursing homes with single rooms in respect for private and family life. New nursing homes in Iceland have single rooms and many older nursing homes have been reconstructing their shared rooms into single rooms.

In September 2015 the Minister of Health assigned a project management group to assess the services for the elderly. The group has developed recommendations and proposed actions for necessary changes.

The Act on the Affairs of the Elderly was amended in 2012 to change the use of terms in order to increase the dignity of the elderly. The main object of the modifications was to coordinate working methods of professionals to ensure equal access for the elderly to nursing and residential homes.

A policy on mental health was approved by Alþingi in April 2016 in order to improve knowledge of mental health services in nursing homes in order to provide appropriate mental health services to elderly persons in nursing homes.

The cost of health care services is often a considerable financial burden for elderly people. However, the subsidy system for pharmaceutical products which was introduced in 2013 and a new subsidy system for other health care expenses with a lower maximum monthly and annual cost for elderly people will lower their healthcare expenses considerably.

There are two mandatory and statutory pension schemes in Iceland. The mandatory employment pension scheme which is financed by contributions provides earnings-related pensions depending on contributions and the duration of affiliation. All employed and self-employed persons are covered and have a legal obligation to pay contributions to their respective occupational pension funds. The minimum contribution is 12% of gross salary of which 8% is paid by the employer, and 4% by the employee.

In addition there is a national pension scheme, financed by general taxes, covering all residents with flat-rate income-tested defined benefits depending on duration of residence. The legal retirement age is 67 years. Residence for 40 years between age 16 and 67 is required for a full entitlement to old age-pension and shorter residence periods give rise to proportional entitlement. The pension amount is income-tested. An old-age pensioner, with full entitlement to national pension, who lives alone and has no other means of support, receives a total of ISK 246.902 per month (2016).

The situation of pensioners who have not acquired full entitlement in the national pension scheme has been criticised. Should the income of pensioners, when all is taken into account, (i.e. income from the mandatory employment pension, the national social pension, pension payments from other countries where the pensioner has lived and worked between age 16 and 67, income from work and capital income) fall below a certain level, the social assistance of the local authorities is the ultimate safety net. The financial assistance is at the discretion of the municipalities, but the authorities are encouraged to follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Welfare.

There are continued efforts in ensuring the right of older persons to an adequate standard of living. A review of the social security legislation in Iceland has been ongoing for some years. A committee was appointed by the Minister in 2013 to revise the Social Security Act with regard to the national old-age and invalidity pension schemes. All political parties, the NGO's, the social partners, and the pensioners association were represented in the committee. The committee submitted its report and proposals in the beginning of March 2016 to the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing. The main proposals regarding older persons are i.e. to raise the pension age in social security gradually from 67 to 70, to take up flexible retirement age on a voluntary basis, and make it possible to obtain a pension before the standard retirement age with decreased benefits and to defer the pension for a longer period than presently allowed, with increased benefits. There are proposals on ways to simplify the legislation and on the interaction with the employment

pension scheme. The committee proposes that different types of old-age benefits be merged into one benefit only, old-age pension, and other measures aimed at simplifying the scheme and ensuring the rights of older persons within the national pension scheme.

6. Rights of the child

Children's rights are secured through the Children's Act and the Child Protection Act, as well as in individual provisions in various other legislative acts. Iceland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) in 2012. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Icelandic law in 2013, as well as its two optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. At the same time changes were made to the Children's Act in order to, among other things, incorporate the main principles of the UN Convention. Iceland has however not signed the third optional protocol on communications procedure.

Child welfare

In 2013 Althingi adopted amendments to the Children Act to place greater emphasis on the child's perspective in civil disputes regarding parental responsibility, place of residence, parental access as well as significant changes to the role of the district commissioner who is now granted access to experts in children rights in cases regarding children. The district commissioner shall offer mediation services to parties to cases involving custody, domicile, access, per diem fines, or enforcement measures. The aim of mediation is to help parents reach an agreement which is in the best interest of the child. Children who have attained sufficient maturity shall be given an opportunity to express their views in the course of the mediation process unless this can be seen as having a damaging effect on the child or as being irrelevant regarding the resolution of the case. The amendments strengthen the child's position during adjudication of disputes of cases regarding children. The aim of the amendment was to further establish that the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration in every decision.

In March 2013 Althingi approved an action plan on child protection with the aim of ensuring that children living in unacceptable conditions or who are endangering their health and maturity get necessary and effective health services. The Ministry of Welfare, in collaboration with the Government Agency on Child Protection, the association of municipalities and the City of Reykjavik, is currently preparing a new action plan on child protection, due to be presented before Althingi in the coming months.

In January 2015 the Welfare Watch¹ published proposals on methods of eradicating poverty, including the payment of non-income-related child benefits, with further child insurance to guarantee that all families with children would receive a prescribed minimum level of support, irrespective of their source of income. The Welfare Watch also called for the definition of a minimum support figure or reference frame. Other proposals from the Welfare Watch aimed at giving families with children a secure economic basis, such as housing benefit being paid to meet the housing costs of low-income families and that measures be taken to address the position of children whose parents do not live together.

¹ The Welfare Watch was established in 2009 to monitor the consequences of the economic crisis. It is an independent analytical and advisory body which consists of members from the public sector, the labour market and NGO's.

Another proposal was to revise the Children Act with the view of having child maintenance arrangements meet the needs of all children and their parents in a fair manner. The proposals are currently under revision within the Ministry of Welfare.

Violence against children

Following the signing of the Lanzarote Convention necessary changes were made to the General Penal Code. Furthermore, three ministries collaborated their efforts with the aim of awareness raising and competence building with regard to sexual, psychological and physical violence against children. The main goals of this project, the Awareness Awakening Project, was to promote interdisciplinary co-operation and to launch social awakening by dissemination of information about sexual offences against children amongst the children themselves as well as to people who have direct contact/communication with children in connection to their work. The project was generally considered to have been successful; it hosted a number of educational conferences all over the country, saw the making of two short films, educational videos and an educational puppet theater which addressed subjects concerning sexual violence.

The Children's House, which was established by the Government in 1998, for the co-operation and coordination of entities responsible for the investigation and handling of cases concerning sexual violence against children under the age of 18, has undergone some changes recently. In 2014 the Icelandic Government granted additional funding for larger and improved premises and for the hiring of more experts in order to eliminate the waiting list for its services. The services of the Children's House have been expanded and are now available for children who are victims of serious domestic violence. Interviews of unaccompanied children seeking asylum are now also conducted in the Children's House. In June 2016 additional funding was granted for specialist education for the staff of the Children's House and other staff working with disabled children in order to improve services for disabled children where there is a suspicion of violence.

Moreover, special funding was granted to the Metropolitan police for the hiring of a police officer, working solely on the matters of children and youth who have left their parental homes or places of residential care and are potentially in difficult situations or danger.

In order to further strengthen treatment services for youth with substance abuse and/or behavioural problems, a new treatment centre will be established in the capital area in 2018, in co-operation with the Government Agency for Child Protection. The centre is also for young offenders serving custodial sentences.

School culture and bullying

In 2011 and 2012 amendments were made to the Compulsory School Act and Upper Secondary School Act on responsibilities and obligations of the school community concerning school atmosphere, school culture and a framework for work processes to prevent physical, mental, and/or social violence, including mobbing in school. In 2011 a regulation was made on these issues for the Compulsory School level and in early 2016 for the Upper Secondary School level. According to this regulatory framework a positive school atmosphere should characterize all schoolwork and the schools shall form a holistic policy on good school atmosphere, which is characterized by placing children's interest as priority. School leaders shall strive to contribute to positive communication, mutual trust,

solidarity and mutual responsibility of staff, students and parents. Parents have a positive outlook toward the school, they are actively cooperating and they regularly consulted on the behavior, well-being, and communication of student. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture set up on the basis of this regulation a professional council as an advisory body on bullying. The body has for the last four years dealt with various difficult cases of bullying in schools at the Compulsory School Level and a similar body is now being set up for the Upper Secondary School Level based on a new regulation.

In 2012 a regulation on schooling of foster children in compulsory education was set by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to secure and clarify their right to education in the home school of their foster parents.

7. Efforts to combat violence, in particular domestic and sexual abuse

In recent months and years the Icelandic society has opened up on the discussion of violent offences and sexual abuse. The criminal justice system has been criticized for not dealing with cases concerning violence and sexual offences in an appropriate manner. This ongoing criticism, international and domestic, has led to several changes being made, both in legislation and in the justice system.

A local project called *Keep the Window Open* is a pioneering model on dealing with domestic abuse. A work group consisting of experts from various ministries, the local police department, the Agency for Child Protection and the Center for Gender Equality have held meetings around the country to introduce the project to relevant stakeholders. The aim of the meetings is to coordinate measures available to victims of domestic violence and make sure all parties work together as a whole on combatting domestic violence. Moreover, preparations have begun to establish a special institution, a one-stop-shop, which will be available to all victims of any kind of violence.

The Metropolitan Police Department has changed its approach in cases of domestic violence. A joint campaign by the City of Reykjavík, the Metropolitan Police and the Women's Refuge has been in force since January 2015. The aim is to improve procedures in dealing with cases of domestic violence in order to ensure safety in the home, provide victims with better services and offer treatment to perpetrators. It is also intended to improve the position of children in violent households. This campaign focusses especially on providing services to immigrant women and victims with disabilities. The number of cases in which a perpetrator is removed from the home has increased as well as the number of restraining orders.² Althingi has adopted an amendment to the Penal Code which explicitly criminalizes domestic violence in compliance with the Istanbul Convention.

Special attention has been paid to the issue of violence against persons with disabilities, notably women. In 2013 the Ministry of Welfare commissioned a report on the issue and various initiatives have been implemented since then on behalf of the ministry. New educational material for staff working with disabled people has been produced, funding for publishing material on sexual education for disabled people has been provided and additional funding was provided for The Counselling Center for victims of Sexual Violence for an expert on the matters of disabled people. A new Action Plan on the matters of Disabled People is being prepared by the Ministry of Welfare which will,

² 2012: 6. 2013: 12. 2014: 22. First half of 2015: 25

among other things, address the results of the Report on Violence against Disabled Women and contain specific actions in that regard.

The Ministry of the Interior initiated a working group to make suggestions on improvements within the criminal justice system when dealing with sexual offences. The working group analyzed the system in order to find ways to improve the handling of cases, the respect for the rights of victims and suspects and the public's confidence in the justice system.

Compensation for victims of violence in children's institutions

In 2007 a committee was established to investigate the conditions in several children's institutions, which had been operating during different periods in the years from 1945 to 1994. Reports had surfaced about the conditions for children housed in 11 institutions, many of who had suffered serious physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse. The committee interviewed the victims and published a report in 2010. Many of the victims have had to deal with serious consequences of the violence and abuse they suffered well into their adult years. The maximum amount of compensation for each of the victims was set at 6 million ISK, and the amount was based on factors such as the age of the children when they stayed at those institutions, the duration of the stay, family history, the violence they had been subjected to and the consequences. Over a thousand applications for compensation have been made so far, and the combined compensation has reached 2 billion ISK. The work is still ongoing.

A co-ordinator, which was appointed to work with the committee on its task, has also been working on following up with assistance to the victims, in close cooperation with other relevant stakeholders such as municipalities, regarding issues related to accommodation, , education and health care for the victims.

8. Hate crimes and hate speech

According to Art. 233 (a) of the General Penal Code, it is punishable to publicly mock, defame, denigrate or threaten a person or group of persons for their nationality, colour, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, or disseminate such materials. Moreover, the Media Act contains a provision against hate speech and incitement to criminal activities.

The Reykjavík Metropolitan Police have appointed a specialist to increase the capacity to deal with such matters. The police has in the recent years dealt with cases concerning hate speech on the ground of, among other things, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and race.

From 2013 Iceland has participated in the Council of Europe's No Hate Speech movement, a campaign for human rights of young people online. The project stands for equality, dignity, human rights and diversity. It is a project against hate speech, racism and discrimination in their online expression. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture made a contract with the Icelandic Center for Safer Internet (SAFT) to coordinate the project in wide cooperation with youth councils and various NGO's in the youth sector. The goal of the project is mainly awareness raising.

9. Human trafficking

Iceland has ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. A National Plan against trafficking is currently in force. The Icelandic authorities do not have a lengthy experience in dealing with issues relating to human trafficking. In recent years more attention has been placed on this issue and while several projects have been initiated, the Icelandic authorities are aware that further efforts will be necessary in the coming years.

In 2014 the Government established a steering group of experts from relevant ministries, the police, the Directorate of Immigration, the ICEHR, the City of Reykjavik's Human Rights Office and the Red Cross (as of March 2016). The Steering Group shall implement co-operation between the appropriate parties, prioritize the necessary work and ensure a realization of the action plan. It prioritizes awareness-raising and education.

Numerous sessions devoted to these topics have been held by a special education team across the country for professionals working with, or likely to come in contact with, victims of human trafficking, including representatives of labour unions. The sessions were considered successful as they lead to a number of cases being brought to the attention of the authorities. Two specialized teams have been established; a co-operation team and an emergency team which works on a case-to-case basis.

Recent research have indicated that human trafficking is more wide-spread than previously believed. However, more research is necessary to determine further the extent of the issue. The main focus of the Icelandic authorities has been on human trafficking in the workforce, and the Ministry of the Interior in co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Reykjavik Police department held a symposium on human trafficking in the workforce, in order to raise further awareness on the issue.

The Act on Foreigners contains special provisions for victims of human trafficking. Moreover, in order to further strengthen the rights and protection of victims, the authorities signed an agreement in 2014 with the Women's Shelter in Reykjavik, which offers shelter to suspected victims of human trafficking while their cases are under investigation and specialists from the welfare services can offer counselling and support.

The Metropolitan Police Department has placed further emphasis on human trafficking and prostitution and works in close co-operation with the workers unions, the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health as well as the tax authorities. The National Police Commissioner is still assessing the need and measures to be taken in regard of witness protection for victims of human trafficking, though the police will of course provide protection when needed.

10. Prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

There is no special provision in the Icelandic legislation concerning torture. However, Article 68.1 of the Constitution states that no one may be subjected to torture or any other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The wording of this provision is almost identical to the wording of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is a part of the domestic legislation. It is accepted that our constitutional provision would be construed in accordance with the Convention and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. Moreover, all forms of physical violence are punishable under chapter

XXIII of the General Penal Code and chapter XXIV on violations of personal freedom can also be relevant. Furthermore, chapter XIV contains provisions on offences in public office which, among other things, render it punishable for a public official to employ unlawful means to have a person make a confession or give information. In the light of this, it is the view of the Icelandic authorities that the act of torture is sufficiently covered by the Icelandic legislation.

The Icelandic government is currently in the process of ratifying the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A proposal to amend the Act on the Parliamentary Ombudsman is being prepared according to which that institution will become the National Prevention Mechanism (NPM) under the optional protocol which will subsequently be ratified. According to the proposal the Ombudsman will take over the role of NPM 1 January 2017

11. Deprivation of liberty

1. Police custody and imprisonment

According to Art. 67 of the Icelandic Constitution, no one can be deprived of his or her liberty unless clearly stated by law. The person is entitled to know the reasons for the deprivation of liberty without any delay.

The new prison

Prison capacity in Iceland is limited and the prison authorities have had to manage those limited prison capacities and prioritize who will be called in first to serve their sentences. The priority has been to call first in those who have committed the most serious criminal offences.

In 2013 work began on building a new prison in the outskirts of Reykjavik. The new prison will open in the autumn 2016 and replace two prisons in the capital area who no longer meet international requirements, such as the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Both prisons have now been closed. The new prison will be able to detain 56 persons and will be divided between genders. It will also have a state of the art facility for pre-trial detainees and for children who are visiting their parents or other family members.

Juveniles

According to recent legislative changes, children are not sentenced to serve their time in prison unless there are special reasons to do so. Instead they serve their sentence in facilities which fall under the auspices of the Government Agency for Child Protection. Children only serve their sentence in prison if expert find it to be in their best interest in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are always separated from adult prisoners.

Women in prison

The new prison will house both men and women, though in separate parts of the housing facility. The separation can also be maintained in the courtyard and in the work facility. Icelandic legislation allows prison authorities to mix the genders at certain points, i.e. in

the working facility and in everyday activity, but under strict rules and guidelines. Sex offenders and those who are serving time for violent crimes are never allowed to spend time with the opposite sex.

The Bangkok rules are not implemented in Iceland as such. However, the Icelandic legislation and practise concerning women prisoners complies with the Bangkok rules to a large extent. As an example, according to the Act on the Execution of Sentences, prisoners shall enjoy health services comparable to those generally available, in addition to the special health services prescribed in legislation and regulations concerning prisoners. This entails that all gender-specific health care which is available in the community is also available to women prisoners. Also, a woman prisoner may be permitted to have her child with her in prison, if she has an infant child when she begins serving the sentence or gives birth during the term of imprisonment.

It has to be noted that the Icelandic prison population is very small, with the total prison population counting only approximately 150 prisoners, and there are very few women, sometimes only one or even none, who are serving a prison sentence at a given time. The prison authorities are at all times bound by the Administrative Procedures Act and the main principles embodied therein, including the principle of proportionality which entails that an individual assessment has to be made when adverse decisions are taken in order to guarantee that the authority does not go further than necessary. It follows from this that women prisoners' gender-specific needs will have to be taken into account in all decisions concerning the execution of their prison sentences, the prison conditions and their rights in prison. It follows that women who serve time in prison get all the specialized services they need. A pregnant inmate would get doctor's appointments as needed and is never made to give birth in prison but in hospitals where only healthworkers and those of her choosing are present.

New Act on Execution of Sentences

In March 2016 a new Act on Execution of Sentences was passed by Althingi. According to the new Act community service becomes a more viable option on executing sentences, though under certain conditions. Another option for executing sentences is to allow a convict to serve under the supervision of the Prison Authorities under certain conditions. Those who have been convicted of serious criminal offences do not qualify to serve their sentences in this manner.

2. Use of coercion in mental health care

As previously stated Iceland is currently in the process of ratifying the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The process will be finalized this year, and the Parliamentary Ombudsman will become the National Preventive Mechanism.

12. Rights to health

The right to health service is firmly established by law. The objective is to provide everyone access to the optimum health services which are available at any time and equal access to health services, irrespective of financial position. Important steps were taken towards that goal by the implementation of a new subsidy system for pharmaceutical products in 2013. The system builds on payment contribution steps, where the individual pays proportionally less as the costs for pharmaceutical products increase during a 12-

month period. Then his or her payment gradually decreases until annual expenses have reached a maximum amount which lower for pensioners, people with disabilities, children and young people under the age of 22. In the current reimbursement system for health services there is however no annual limit on the patients health care costs although the fees become lower after the annual payments have reached a certain amount. Health problems can therefore result in high costs without adequate protection. A legislative proposal on a similar subsidy system for other health services was adopted in June 2016 and will enter into force in February 2017. The monthly and annual maximum on out of pocket payments will be decided by the Minister of Health in a regulation.

It has been criticized that psychiatric health services for certain groups, in particular children, prisoners and asylum-seekers, is inadequate. Waiting lists are too long, and services may not be available at all.

13. Decent work / employment

In Iceland decent working conditions and respect for worker's rights are considered essential elements for fair and balanced social development. Trade unions are well established in Iceland, and the vast majority of workers in Iceland are unionised. The Constitution specifically safeguards trade unions but also contains a special provision guaranteeing the right to remain non-unionised.

Iceland has ratified the ILO core conventions on workers' rights. Moreover, many provisions of ICRMW are already in the Icelandic legislation. However, Iceland has decided not to ratify the ICRMW as it is believed that the necessary human rights instruments are already in place.

14. Freedom of opinion and expression

Article 73 of the Constitution protects freedom of opinion and expression. The Article was formulated in accordance to Article 10 of the ECHR and Article 19 of the ICCPR. The Constitution allows for limitations to be set on freedom of expression, which must be put forth in a legislation and also comply with the criteria stipulated in Article 73 of the Constitution as well as Article 10 of the ECHR.

In recent years the European Court of Human Rights has found a violation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights in several cases against Iceland which all concerned journalists who had been found liable for defamation by the domestic courts. The judgments did not reveal a problem with the Icelandic legislation but rather that the domestic courts had not applied the principles stemming from the Convention in a satisfactory manner.

Media

In 2013 various amendments were made to the Media Act to strengthen human rights issues and democratic principles. Media service providers shall, in all their activities, uphold democratic principles and ensure freedom of expression. They shall respect human rights and equality as well as the right to personal privacy, except in cases where the media service provider's democratic role and the right of the public to information dictate otherwise. In Art. 27 prohibition against hate speech and incitement to criminal activity in strengthened. Media outlets may not encourage criminal activity. Moreover, they may not

engage in direct incitement of hatred on grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, religious belief, nationality, cultural, economic or social situation or other status.

The Media Commission is an independent administrative committee under the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The Media Commission carries out the supervision according to the Media Law and attends day-to-day administration in the fields covered by the law. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive governs EEA-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media. The Directive amends the Television Without Frontiers Directive in a number of areas including enlargement in scope, advertising rules, advertising “unhealthy“ foods and beverages in children’s programmes, and promotes areas including media literacy and access for persons with a hearing or visual impairment. The Directive also makes provision for the designation of major events, short news reporting, promotion of European works, rules relating to product placement, jurisdiction issues, self and co-regulation, and independent national regulators. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive has been transposed by the Media Law 2011.

The Media Commission monitors programming which can be harmful for a child’s development and the use of advance warnings in television programming. The Media Commission also issues broadcasting licences in Iceland. Certain information about the media market and media companies must be available to the public according to the Media Law. This information is gathered by the Media Commission and made available on its website. This includes information about media ownership, list of media service providers and their rules on editorial independence.

Language

According to the *Act respecting the status of the Icelandic language and Icelandic sign language* from 2011 Icelandic is the national language of the Icelandic people and the official language of Iceland. Icelandic sign language is the first language of those who must rely on it for expression and communication, and of their children and fostered and supported by public authorities. Icelandic Braille is the first written language of those who have to rely on it for expression and communication. Since 2011 this act has been implemented by the Government and various stakeholders, and the Icelandic Language Council and the Icelandic Sign Language Council. According to this act Icelandic is the language of the Althing, the courts, public authorities, schools at all levels of the education system, and other entities involved in public works or providing services to the public. Central and local authorities are responsible for preserving and promoting the Icelandic language and language policy. In 2012 the Icelandic Government accepted a language policy for the Government based on the language act. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of this act, and every year a National Day of the Icelandic Language, (16th November) and the Icelandic Sign Language (11. February) is celebrated.

15. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

According to Art. 63 of the Constitution freedom of religion is guaranteed. The constitutional provision also protects the right of people to not be a member of a religious association. However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church of Iceland and is protected as such by the Constitution. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of people who have decided not to be a member of the national church, choosing another religious association instead or deciding not to be registered in any religious association.

In 2013 the Act on Registered Religious Associations was amended to allow secular life stance organizations to register in the same way as religious associations, providing that certain basic conditions are met. For example, the such organizations must be based on a secular ideology, have a lawful purpose and in active operation. The aim was to ensure that both kinds of associations, i.e. religious and secular, enjoy equal rights and obligation in accordance with law, as well as to ensure the rights of parents to decide what association their child shall belong to. Before the amendment, the child was automatically registered in the same religious association as the mother.

According to legislation in the field of education it is emphasized that schools are educational institutions. School pupils are supposed, among other things, to get religious educations according to national curriculum guidelines. The schools are not supposed to be used for religious practice and the religious freedom of pupils is taken into account. However, a co-operation between schools and educational institutions and churches is allowed to a certain extent for educational purposes.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture established in 2012 a working group to make proposals concerning the arrangements for co-operation between schools and religious organizations at all school levels. The group agreed on a proposal for co-operation between schools and religious organizations based on which the Minister of Education, Science and Culture accepted and introduced these guidelines to all schools and stakeholders. The guidelines clarified the different role of schools and religious institutions and emphasized that a quality religious education is important in a multicultural society within the school system. Site visits to religious organizations and visits of the representatives from religious institutions to schools should be organized within the framework of the National Curriculum for Pre-School, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools. It is also recommended that municipalities establish their own guidelines for the co-operation of religious organizations and schools within this framework.

The Reykjavik City Council granted the muslim community in Iceland a building site in the capital region in September 2013 in conformity with its practise related to other religious associations, who have been granted their own site to build their churches and temples.

16. Freedom of assembly and association

The freedom of association is protected by Art. 74 of the Constitution. The scope of protection also covers negative freedom of association, i.e. the freedom not to stay join organized associations. The provision specifically refers to the establishment of political associations and trade unions, which are seen as the most important associations operating in democratic societies. No obligation is placed upon political associations to register or make notice of their establishment or operation, however financial support of political associations by foreign entities is prohibited. This restriction is based on public interest, and its aim is to prevent foreign entities from gaining power in national politics.

Art. 74 (3) of the Constitution guarantees the right to assembly. In April 2016 the largest demonstrations since the global financial crisis hit Iceland were held in front of Althingi where an estimated 20 thousand people gathered to protest the government and, in particular, individual ministers. The protest was peaceful and the Prime Minister resigned

a few days later. The Government called for parliamentary elections, which had been scheduled for spring 2017, to be held later this year.

17. Education

A White Paper on educational reform in Iceland was brought forth in 2014 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The aim of the paper is to provide students of all ages with an education required for life and work in a modern society. Reading comprehension, mathematical and scientific literacy have declined over the past decade and are now below the OECD average. The White Paper focusses on identifying where efforts to strengthen the Icelandic education system need to be directed and which strategies are most likely to provide students with the education mandated by law and the National Curriculum Guides.

Iceland has a comprehensive and well-established system of identifying learners' special educational needs and allocating resources to provide support in pre-school and compulsory education. Inclusive education (Education for All) is the guiding policy of Iceland's national education system. A report on the Inclusive Education was published in May 2015 and the main findings were that whilst most stakeholders fully support the national policy, there are different interpretations of what that means to different stakeholders. Teachers in particular appear to feel uncertain about their changing role in relation to implementing the national policy. Concerns were raised regarding the increasing demand placed upon teachers and their ability to cope with the perceived increased workload.

An External Audit of the inclusive education system in Iceland is in 2016 conducted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education working co-operatively, but independently from any stakeholders within the Icelandic system. The main focus of the External Audit is a collective exploration of how successful the implementation of the Icelandic policy for inclusive education is in practice. The External Audit takes a standards-based audit approach, following a model that involves the internal definition of desired standards for the inclusive education system by stakeholders in Iceland and external data collection by the Agency audit team to examine current practice against the identified standards. The External Audit will consider structure, process and outcome factors and will lead to information that can be used to plan systematic improvements for the system in Iceland in the long term.

Human rights education

Human right education in Iceland is an integrated part of the whole school culture and working methods of schools and is, in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide, a cross-curricular activity which should be integrated into various subjects. However, human rights education is more visible in social studies than in other subject areas and also in Icelandic, native language education and foreign languages. Various material from the Council of Europe has been used to promote human rights education in recent years and a large part of it has been translated into Icelandic and used both in formal education, non-formal education and youth activities. The Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education from the Council of Europe has been translated into Icelandic and disseminated to the schools and various stakeholders as an important tool to guide human rights education at all levels as well as democratic citizenship.

A Parliamentary resolution was adopted in March 2016 according to which the Minister of Interior in consultation with the Minister of Education, Science and Culture shall dedicate one day a year, 20 November which is the day when the Convention on the Rights of the child was adopted, to the teaching of children's rights

The educational policy which appears in the National Curriculum Guide is based on six fundamental pillars: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity. The fundamental pillars are interrelated and interdependent in education and school activities. They are based on the idea that active democracy is unobtainable without literacy of the diverse symbolism and communication systems of society. They are also based on the idea that active democracy can only flourish if simultaneously every form of equality between individuals and groups in society is supported. Human rights will not be ensured except by supporting individual health and welfare and by fighting discrimination and every form of violence, including bullying. Education for democracy and human rights is based on critical thinking and reflection on the basic values of society. Such education relies on co-operation with parties inside and outside the school. Thus active co-operation is expected from the homes of children and youth concerning sports and youth work. Active co-operation with the local community within the municipality or area is required, but such co-operation is one of the key factors of sustainability. It is essential for democratic schools to take in this way part in creating a sustainable society of collective responsibility. In preparing teaching materials and selecting them for use, care is taken that they are in accordance with the fundamental pillars of education. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is negotiating with UNICEF Iceland to assist schools to address the human rights perspective of the Convention of the Child in their daily work.

Iceland has decided not to ratify the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. The main provisions of the convention are believed to be already guaranteed in Icelandic legislation.

18. Environmental rights

Participatory rights regarding environmental matters are ensured in Icelandic environmental legislation. Furthermore, public authorities and private entities carrying out any public service are required by law to provide environmental information to the public. The right to participate in decision making on environmental matters is safeguarded in several acts of law. This includes the requirement of public consultation before an Environmental Impact Assessment is finalised, before municipalities adopt local plans, before the deliberate release and placement on the market of Genetically Modified Organisms, as well as before an operating license can be granted to a polluting operation. Furthermore, members of the public with sufficient interest have access to a review procedure before a special ruling committee, to challenge the substantive and procedural legality of any decision, act or omission subject to the provisions of the UNECE Convention (Aarhus Convention) on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The Convention, which links human rights and environmental rights, was ratified in 2011.

4. National human rights priorities

A. Ratification of international human rights instruments

Iceland will continue making efforts to ensure that Icelandic legislation is in line with international human rights instruments. Iceland intends to ratify the following:

- The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.
- The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention)
- The Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.
- The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Iceland does not intend to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families or the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

B. Implementation of human rights in Iceland

Extensive emphasis will be placed on democratic, judicial and executive reform. As previously stated, changes to the Icelandic Constitution are currently under revision, where one proposition is to amend the Constitution so that a certain number or percentage of voters can enforce a referendum on legislations passed by Alþingi, though not regarding taxes, the State budget and legislations that ensure the implementation of Iceland's international obligations.

Human Rights Conventions signed and ratified by Iceland will continue to be transposed into Icelandic law and a Human Rights Policy drafted following Nordic models. Education in human rights will be increased at all levels of education.

More attention will be given to equal rights issues within public administration. Actions will be taken to eliminate the gender pay gap and gender-based violence.

Iceland will continue in their efforts to improve the legal status of LGBTQIA persons.

Emphasis will be placed on ensuring the rights of immigrants and asylum-seekers in accordance with the new Act on Foreigners and Iceland's international obligations.

Emphasis will be placed on ensuring the rights and participation of people of foreign origin and further possibilities on revised legislation on asylum and immigration explored.

C. Iceland's international priorities

Iceland is a committed advocate for human rights and fundamental freedoms in its bilateral and multilateral relations, including at the United Nations, the OSCE, and in other international fora. Iceland further promotes human rights through its development cooperation and free trade agreements.

As a leader in gender equality, the promotion of women's rights, women's empowerment, their participation in decision-making, and combatting violence against women remain a cornerstone in Iceland's foreign policy. Iceland's Strategy for International Development Cooperation 2013-2016 incorporates a dedicated Gender Equality Policy, which also cuts across all of its focus areas. A special emphasis has been put on engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality as well as on women, peace and security, with focus on their full and meaningful participation. Iceland's third National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the period 2017-2020 is under way.

Iceland also actively promotes the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation and gender identity; the rights of the child; action against trafficking in human beings; the protection of human rights while countering terrorism and violent extremism; as well as the elimination of torture, death penalty and extrajudicial executions.

Iceland promotes the universal ratification and implementation of human rights instruments and is furthermore committed to the implementation of Agenda 2030, including as relates to the rule of law, the respect for human rights and gender equality and the integrated approach embedded in the Global Goals.