



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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Human Rights Committee

Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Iceland

Addendum

Information received from Iceland on follow-up to the concluding observations*

[Date received: 14 July 2015]

7. While welcoming the adoption of the Gender Equality Act and the establishment of the Centre for Gender Equality, the Committee is concerned that there is a significant, and an again increasing, wage gap between women and men. It is also concerned that women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions, in particular in the Foreign Service, the judiciary and academia (arts. 2 and 3).

The State party should continue to take steps, in particular through the centre for Gender Equality and a speedy adoption of equal salary standards, to continue to address the persistent and significant wage gap between women and men, guaranteeing equal pay for work of equal value. It should also introduce measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions, in particular in the Foreign Service, the judiciary, and academia.

1. Promoting equality and ensuring that women and men enjoy equal rights in all respects has been a key priority of the Government of Iceland for many years. The Constitution stipulates that men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects. Icelandic authorities remain focused on eliminating discrimination and have committed to the “Impact 10x10x10” project in connection with the #HeforShe initiative.¹ As stated in the project, Iceland will make bold commitments to fundamentally change gender norms, and achieve gender equality. Iceland commits to close the gender pay gap by 2022, engage men and boys for gender equality through the Barbershop and the HeForShe campaign and close the gender gap in the media.

2. The parliament has, over the past few decades, regularly passed four-year action plans on measures to implement gender equality under article 11 of the Gender Equality

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

¹ See for further detail: <http://www.heforshe.org/impact/>.



Act, No. 10/2008. The Gender Equality Action Plan is to include projects intended to secure gender equality in Icelandic society. The parliamentary resolution on the gender equality action plan for the years 2011-2014 was passed by the parliament in 2011.² This was the fifth resolution adopted on the subject since 1986. The Action Plan is still active and is divided into several chapters, each addressing a different focus. These are: The Administration, The labour market – the Gender Pay Gap, Gender and Power, Gender-based Violence, Education and Gender Equality, Men and Gender Equality, International Activities, Follow-up and Revision.

Regarding the gender pay gap

3. With almost 80 per cent of women active in the labour market, Iceland has one of the highest labour force participation rates in the world. Despite this progress, a gender pay gap persists: women are paid 5.7 per cent to 18.3 per cent less than men.

4. In December 2011 the now Minister of Social Affairs and Housing appointed an Executive Committee on Gender Wage Equality, the role of which was to supervise and coordinate measures designed to reduce gender-based wage discrimination in accordance with the Four-year Plan of Action on Gender Equality. Amongst other things, the committee was entrusted with coordinating measures to reduce gender-based wage discrimination and working on the production of a plan of action, including a time-scheme for its implementation.

5. A Plan of Action on Gender Equality Regarding Wages, produced by the Government and the social partners, was unveiled in October 2012. It set forth projects intended to promote greater wage equality. On the same occasion, a collaborative declaration was signed between the Government and the social partners' organizations, following which the Minister appointed a task force to supervise the measures set out in the Action Plan. Amongst the duties of the task force were the coordination of studies of gender-based wage differentials, the preparation of a programme to publicize and introduce the Equal Pay Standard, a special campaign and counselling programme for enterprises and institutions to work against gender-based wage differentials and the preparation of materials to reduce it. The Action Plan also stated that the Government was to raise awareness among employers and those active on the labour market regarding ways of facilitating the integration of the demands of family and working life, and that a programme was to be drawn up to reduce gender-based differences in career choice, the aim being to break down gender barriers on the labour market. These projects are, materially, closely related to the campaign against the gender pay gap, and the Minister has commissioned the task force to prepare a plan of action in the relevant areas.

6. In accordance with the Action Plan, a committee is in operation in the Ministry of Finance, consisting of two representatives from the Association of University Graduates, two from the Union of State and Municipal Employees and the same number from the Association of Heads of Public Institutions and two from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. The committee is charged with four main functions. Firstly, it is to examine data in the state's wage system and identify the explanatory variables that can be regarded as relevant in explaining the gender pay gap. Secondly, it is to examine the structure of collective wage agreements with a view to establishing how far the gender pay gap can be attributed to features in the system. Thirdly, the committee is to prepare guidelines for heads of state institutions on how to respond if an examination of wages paid

² Accessible in English at: <http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/rit-og-skyrslur2012/Parliamentary-Res-Gender-Equality-2011-2014-FINAL.pdf>.

reveals a gender pay gap, and fourthly, it is to act in an advisory capacity to the Ministry of Welfare in preparing a schedule for publicizing the Equal Pay Standard.

7. Further is to be mentioned that in the “Impact 10x10x10” project, Icelandic authorities have set out the aim of eliminating the gender pay gap by 2022, ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work. The Government intends to launch a top-to-bottom audit of the gender-based pay gap across all companies in Iceland—from the largest companies all the way to family-owned business and further build on the multi-stakeholder approach between the state, local authorities, social partners and the private sector.

Regarding women in decision-making positions

8. No notable changes are to report regarding women in the judiciary and the academia since the issue of the concluding observations.

9. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is aware of the need to balance the representation of men and women in decision-making positions, in the Ministry as well as its missions abroad. In 2009, the Ministries of the Government of Iceland concurred on a joint plan of action for gender equality which includes paragraphs on equal access to opportunities for promotions for men and women. For the past two decades the Ministry has made an effort to reverse the traditional division of jobs into men’s and women’s jobs, and for instance, advertisements of job vacancies in the Ministry always include a phrase of encouragement to both women and men to apply for the vacant position. With continued efforts to balance the representation of men and women in decision-making positions, the Ministry is confident that its efforts will lead to the desired results.

<i>Ambassadors</i>	2011	%	2012	%	2013	%	2014	%	2015	%
Men	26	72	25	74	27	75	28	76	29	74
Women	10	28	9	26	9	25	9	24	10	26
Total	36	100	34	100	36	100	37	100	39	100

15. *The Committee is concerned that very few cases of sexual abuse of children that are reported to child protection services lead to prosecution, and even fewer to conviction of the perpetrator. (arts 2 and 24)*

The State party should take urgent steps to ensure that all cases of sexual abuse of children are effectively and promptly investigated, and that perpetrators are brought to justice. It should take steps to establish Government-coordinated measures aimed at prevention of sexual abuse of children. The State party should also ensure that education about child sexual abuse and prevention become a formal part of the curriculum in faculties training teachers and other professionals working with children, as well as for faculties training health professionals, lawyers and police officers.

10. It is the view of the Icelandic authorities that cases of sexual abuse of children are effectively and promptly investigated in Iceland, although there is an ever present room for improvement for Iceland, as for any country, in this respect.

11. The Icelandic Police Academy has conducted a number of specialized courses for the police force regarding the investigation and prosecution in cases regarding sexual abuse of children in the years 2012 – 2015. The aim of the courses is to strengthen and improve the procedures applied in such cases.

12. In connection with the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the so-called Lanzarote Convention, Icelandic Authorities embarked on an extensive project to raise

awareness about sexual, emotional and physical violence against children in a three year collaborative project of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Welfare. The project operated from 2012 to 2015 and included the issuing of teaching material and tailor-made training for the judicial system and child protection system.

13. Here below an overview is given of the largest projects. A detailed overview of the project can be found in the report of the Awareness Raising available in English.³

Education for children

14. On the basis of the Lanzarote Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, educational material for children has been produced by the guiding light of ensuring that children receive information about the threat of sexual violence and how they can protect themselves as well. Special emphasis has been placed on risk situations that involve the use of new information- and telecommunications technology. The education is always produced on the basis of children's rights to protection, care and necessary assistance as well as their right to activity and participation in matters pertaining to them.

Education for adults

15. On the basis of the Lanzarote Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, educational material for parents and people who work with children was produced under the guiding light of raising awareness about the protection and rights of children. The objective is also to ensure sufficient knowledge of violence against children, methods to discern such things and ways to respond if a child informs of violence. The education includes information about how obligatory reporting duty by professionals is greater than their confidentiality on the job. Raising Awareness set up a social network of personnel from all institutions and organizations relating to the field. It covers over 1500 representatives and has been used to share information about the various educational projects of Raising Awareness.

Educational treatise for school personnel: violence against children – the role of schools

16. Raising Awareness made a contract with the National Centre for Educational Materials about the production of a handbook about violence against children for school personnel (only published in Icelandic). Its objective is to inform teachers and other school personnel about the characteristics and impact of violence on children and draw attention to preventive measures, intervention and resources that are in place to ensure, as well as possible, the wellbeing of students.

17. Educational treatise for judicial system personnel: Sexual violence against children. Case procedure of the judicial system and judicial protection.

18. Raising Awareness made a contract with the Ármann Snævarr Research Institute of Family Issues about the production of an educational treatise about case procedures within the judicial system and judicial protection of children in sexual violence cases (only published in Icelandic). The objective is inter alia to discern main principles of primary international conventions and outline those items which must be borne in mind during the judicial system procedure of cases about sexual violence against children. It discusses roles, work methods and the interplay of different parties within the judicial system and detects

³ Available in English at:
http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/vitundarvakning/RaisingAwareness_report2011-2014en.pdf.

how case procedures may be carried out in order to ensure exemplary work methods regarding sexual violence against children.

Educational conferences for professionals

19. Eighteen educational conferences were held under the auspice of Raising Awareness throughout the country during the years 2012-2014. They were intended for people who work with children and/or in connection with children. Primary specialists in the field gave talks and ministers of those ministries which Raising Awareness falls under delivered addresses.

20. Results of a success survey which Raising Awareness conducted indicates that the success of the educational conferences is considerable. Respondents were for the most part pleased with the educational conference which they attended and felt that it had been useful in their work as well as being interested in attending another comparable educational conference.

Courses for people who work with children

Courses for teachers

21. Raising Awareness and the National Centre for Educational Materials held the course Gender-like Journey – a course about gender education across study subjects for teachers at intermediate- and secondary level. The course was held on the basis of the European Council's Pestalozzi programme on job development and teacher training. The objective of the course is to strengthen the skills and teachers' confidence to implement gender perspectives in their teaching.

Courses for the judicial system

22. Leading up to the publication of the educational treatise, entitled “Sexual Violence against Children, Case procedure by the judicial system and the judicial protection of children”, courses were held which were based on the educational treatise and tailored to people who work in the field with children or are in contact with children. The publication of the educational treatise was followed up with tailor-made training course in all parts of the Country. Nearly 200 participants from within the justice system and local authorities, such as child protection services, attended the courses.

Raising the public's awareness

23. On the basis of the Lanzarote Convention, Raising Awareness endeavoured to increase the public's knowledge of violence against children and to encourage discussion about the matter in the media. Raising Awareness worked on this in two ways:

Postcards

24. The duty reporting system about violence was specifically stipulated in a postcard to the public which was delivered to all homes in March 2013. The objective of the postcard was to remind the public of the serious subject that violence against children is and the people's duty to report to child protection if suspicion arises about a child living with violence or abuse. The postcard was in Icelandic.

Briefs and summaries

25. Raising Awareness compiled available educational material about violence against children and made an overview of public parties relating to the protection of children in Iceland.