



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination against Women**

**List of issues and questions in relation to the combined
seventh and eighth periodic reports of Iceland**

Addendum

Replies of Iceland*

[Date received: 13 November 2015]

Note: The present document is being circulated in English, French and Spanish only.
* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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Legislative and institutional framework

1. In its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/ICE/CO/6](#), para. 14), the Committee recommended that the State party increase its efforts to raise awareness of the provisions of the Convention, its Optional Protocol, the Committee's jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol and general recommendations among judges, prosecutors, lawyer and other legal professionals. Please provide information on any awareness raising measures in this regard and provide examples of cases where the Convention has been invoked before the courts.

2. Answer: This year Iceland has been celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's rights to vote. Accordingly there have been numerous meetings and conferences on women's rights and women's empowerment open to the public and involving participants from all walks of life, including the justice system. The anniversary has generated a lot of discussion throughout the country on women's rights, especially civil and political rights.

3. Before proceeding to ratify international human rights treaties the Icelandic Government ensures, through legislative and other measures that Icelandic law is adapted to the provisions of the treaty concerned. In principle, the treaty as such is not adopted into law. This again affects references to treaties by the courts, which generally refer to legislation that might be based on treaties while not referring to provisions of the treaties (in this case, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women), as such.

4. The aims of Iceland's Gender Equality Act are to establish and maintain equality of rights and opportunities for women and men, so equalizing their position in all areas of society, and that all individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and develop their skills, irrespective of gender. The provisions of the section of the Act stating these aims place positive obligations on government authorities in the field of gender equality; they state that steps are to be taken specifically to improve the position of women with progressive measure and to increase their opportunities in society; these aims are based on article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

5. The State party report indicates that Act No. 62/2014 amending the Gender Equality Act No. 10/2008 introduced a new definition of direct and indirect discrimination based on sex or gender in article 2 of the latter. Please indicate whether this article has since been invoked before the courts and provide examples of cases, if any. Please provide information on any measures or regulations taken under the revised Gender Equality Act to establish an equal pay standard. Please also provide updated information on the two cases mentioned in the report (page 4) that have been pending before the Gender Equality Complaints Committee since April 2014.

6. Answer: No cases have yet come before the Supreme Court in which reference has been made to the definition of direct and/or indirect discrimination based on gender since the amendment of the article under Act No. 62/2014; nor have any been submitted to the district courts. A search on the website of the Supreme Court and the district courts revealed no instances in which reference was made to the definitions in question. The reply to a question put to the Judicial Council confirmed this search result.

7. The Gender Equality Complaints Committee was contacted in connection with the above item regarding Question 2. It was not possible to find out exactly which two

cases before the complaints committee were referred to in Iceland's report, and information on this was requested. According to information from the Gender Equality Complaints Committee, nine cases were referred to it in 2014. Five concerned employment engagements, one concerned wage terms, one concerned dismissal from employment one concerned discrimination in the granting of a loan and one concerned discrimination in the granting of rehabilitation pension. The conclusion in four cases was that the Gender Equality Act had been violated; in two, the conclusion was that no violation had taken place. Three cases were dismissed by the committee.

8. According to information before the Committee, the budget and staff of the Centre for Gender Equality were cut, although its mandate was expanded in 2008. Please indicate whether any measures have been taken by the State party to mitigate the impact of the budgetary and staffing cuts on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Centre and to make its services more accessible to rights holders, including women, given its remote location from the capital.

9. Answer: Allocations by the state to the Centre for Gender Equality were cut in the years 2009-2013; however, it proved possible to obtain special income which, even though it varied from year to year, kept the centre afloat during this period. These sources of income meant that despite the cuts, it was not necessary to lay off staff, and they also enabled the centre to publish informative material, hold numerous courses and mount some large conferences. The operational outcome for 2014, during which the centre tackled many large tasks, produced a loss, and it was an advantage to be able to utilize the operational surplus from 2013, which was nevertheless assigned to specific projects. Treasury allocations, income from special sources and expenses at the Centre for Gender Equality during the period 2007-2014 are shown below.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Allocation from state Treasury</i>	<i>Income from special sources</i>	<i>Total expenses</i>
2007	40 800 000	23 060 980	64 347 729
2008	63 300 000	23 131 594	76 989 699
2009	66 400 000	98 555 594	134 938 688
2010	61 300 000	22 245 120	99 219 283
2011	63 900 000	3 413 243	89 946 804
2012	63 500 000	16 843 458	92 330 440
2013	74 700 000	50 217 622	97 951 236
2014	80 800 000	28 165 801	138 276 502

10. With the passing of the new Gender Equality Act in 2008, the Centre for Gender Equality was faced with an expanded range of tasks and obligations. In response to this, allocations from the Treasury rose by ISK 22.5 m and two employees were added to the staff. Iceland experienced an economic collapse in autumn that year, which was followed by steep price-level increases, and the Treasury allocation was raised by ISK 3.1 m in 2009. Running the centre was difficult in 2010-2012, as the allocation from the state was reduced slightly in those years despite price increases and a large volume of work at the centre.

11. When the centre's finances are under discussion, it should be borne in mind that its responsibilities include 'Men's Responsibility,' a remedial treatment programme

for men and women who commit violent acts against their spouses. (More than ISK 9 m has been channelled towards this during the current year, including supplementary allocations from the Ministry.) Funding for this important programme, as for other expense items, has been reduced. In addition, the centre pays high rent for its premises at Borgir (in Akureyri).

12. What has kept the Centre for Gender Equality afloat, financially, has been the income from its special sources, and this explains the variations in its expense figures to some extent as well. Two years, 2009 and 2014, are markedly different in this respect; this was when Iceland exercised the rotating chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

13. The amount of ISK 100 m, most of it in foreign currency, passed through the Centre for Gender Equality in 2009; the amount in 2014 was lower. This money was used for various projects connected with Iceland's chairmanship, including the holding of conferences and financing large-scale studies of maternity, paternity and parental leave in the Nordic countries in 2009-2011. The centre has also regularly applied for grants from the European Union's Progress Fund. Iceland pays into the Progress Fund and so is entitled to receive support from it if applications meet the requirements. Little of the centre's special-source income has come from the Treasury, apart from special grants for specific projects: most of it is from external sources.

14. Please provide information on the impact of and lessons learned from the implementation of the 2011-2014 Action Plan on Gender Equality. Please indicate the impact of the gender-responsive budgeting policy introduced by the State party to mitigate the impact of austerity measures on women and whether this approach has been replicated in the new four-year action plan on gender equality. Please also provide information on the mechanisms and measures adopted to ensure an equal participation of women in the entire process of elaboration and adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.

15. Answer: Under article 10 of the Gender Equality Act, No. 10/2008, a Gender Equality Forum is to be held every two years, at which the minister responsible for gender equality issues presents a report on the situation and developments in gender equality issues, including an assessment of the status and success of the projects covered by the current gender equality action plan adopted as a parliamentary resolution (article 11). The latest report was presented in October 2013, with a detailed description of the status of the 43 projects of the Action Plan. Project 43 is an evaluation and revision process; according to the report, 7 projects were finished with concluding results, 17 were ongoing, 13 were being prepared and 4 had not started. A final report on the Action Plan is now being written and will be published before the Gender Equality Forum on 25 November 2015. Alongside the final report a new Action Plan is being prepared that will build on the knowledge and experience of the previous Action Plan. The draft will be adopted as the new Parliamentary Resolution on Gender Equality 2015-2018 this autumn.

16. The report is silent on the previous recommendation of the Committee to consider establishing an independent national human rights institution with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights, including women's rights. Please indicate the steps taken by the State party towards establishing such a national human rights institution, in line with the Paris Principles on National Human Rights Institutions.

17. Answer: The establishment of a national human rights institution is under active consideration in connection with the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At this time the Ministry of the Interior is working on the establishment of an NHRI in Iceland by looking at already existing organizations that could assume that role and what would need to be done so the Paris Principles are fulfilled. At the moment it is not possible to give an estimated timeline for the project.

Violence against women

18. In its previous concluding observations, the Committee expressed concern about the light penalties for sexual violence, the lack of updated detailed information and about the disparity between the numbers of investigated cases of sexual offences, and the numbers of prosecutions and convictions. In light of the Committee's previous concluding observations, please indicate whether the State party has reviewed its Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code to ensure that perpetrators of violence against women are adequately prosecuted and punished in accordance with the gravity of their acts. Please also provide updated information on the number of cases of rape reported per year, of prosecutions and on the sentences imposed on perpetrators, disaggregated by age and relationship of victims with perpetrators. Please explain the rising level of acquittals and the decrease in convictions of sex offences between 2007 and 2011.

19. Answer: The Ministry of the Interior is currently submitting to parliament an amendment to the Penal Code to specifically criminalize domestic violence and to fully implement the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The bill will be submitted to the parliament in the coming weeks.

20. In 2013, 180 rapes were reported to the police; the figure for 2014 was 129.

21. Information on the number of cases of rape reported in 2014 is presented below, broken down by age and relationship between the victims and the perpetrators. This information is only available for 2014.

22. The age of the victims ranged from 15-60 years. The average age of women was 26 years, and also for men, 26 years.

Victim/offender relationship definitions:

- *Stranger*: Subjects had never met before, subjects met for the first time that same night/day, subjects established contact through internet and all their communication was online with no close mutual friends in real life.
- *Acquaintance*: Subjects knew of each other's existence through mutual friends, subjects interacted with each other before; subjects had a professional/work relationship. Subjects defined themselves as acquaintances.
- *Friend*: Subjects have a confident-friend relationship; they trusted each other and cared for each other. Subjects defined them self as friends.
- *Partner/ex-partner*: Subjects are or were in an intimate relationship at the time of the offence or had been so before.
- *Family relations*: Relative, parent, grandparent, step-relationships etc.

- *Family friend*: Close friend of a family member.
- *Employee in residential housing*: Residential housing for people with special needs etc.
- *NA*: Relationship is not clear after reading case reports.

<i>Rape</i>			
Total offences	129		
Victims	Women	Men	
Rate	93.6%	6.4%	
<i>Victim/offender relationship*</i>	<i>Average of Age</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Stranger	25	39%	11%
Acquaintance	23	25%	67%
Friend	27	12%	0%
Partner/ex-partner	30	9%	0%
Family relations	28	3%	11%
Unknown offender	25	3%	0%
Family friend	27	1%	0%
Employee at residential housing	36	1%	0%
NA	25	7%	11%
		100%	100%

* In one offence there may be more than one offender and different relationships. Here all relationships are included.

23. In 2012, 58 cases were referred to the Directorate of Public Prosecutions 22 indictments were issued and 35 cases were dropped. Investigation was curtailed in one case. Of the 21 cases in which indictments were issued, acquittals were rendered in nine cases and convictions in 12. Appeals were lodged with the Supreme Court in 11 cases. The Supreme Court rendered convictions in five cases and acquittals in three; two cases were referred back to the district court.

24. In 2013, 62 cases were referred to the Directorate of Public Prosecutions 21 indictments were issued and 36 cases were dropped. Investigations were curtailed in three cases, and two cases were curtailed for other reasons. Of the 21 cases in which indictments were issued, acquittals were rendered in 7 cases and convictions in 14. Appeals were lodged with the Supreme Court in 16 cases. The Supreme Court rendered convictions in nine cases and acquittals in two; four cases are yet to be judged by the Supreme Court and one was referred back to district court.

25. In 2014, 70 cases were referred to the Directorate of Public Prosecutions 13 indictments were issued and 40 cases were dropped. Investigations were curtailed in one case, one case was a conditional deferment of indictment, and three cases required further investigation. Furthermore 12 cases are still pending. Of the 27 cases in which indictments were issued, acquittals were rendered in one case and convictions in five; seven remain to be judged. Appeals were lodged with the

Supreme Court in three cases. The Supreme Court rendered convictions in one case and two cases are yet to be judged by the Supreme Court.

26. As regards imposed sentences than that statistic is only available from the Prison and Probation administration and only for sentences that were referred to them during the period to start the serving of a sentence.

<i>2012, total 13 judgments</i>	<i>Terms of imprisonment</i>
2	18 months
1	20 months
3	24 months
3	48 months
3	60 months
1	96 months
<i>2013, total 8 judgments</i>	<i>Terms of imprisonment</i>
2	18 months
1	24 months
1	42 months
1	54 months
1	84 months
2	96 months
<i>2014, total 10 judgments</i>	<i>Terms of imprisonment</i>
1	3 months
2	24 months
1	36 months
2	42 months
1	60 months
1	72 months
1	120 months
1	12 months, conditional sentencing 3 years

27. No analysis has been made of the reasons for rising level of acquittals between 2007 and 2011.

28. Reportedly, the introduction of the system of protection orders in 2011 did not prove to be effective, also due to the short duration of such orders (48 hours). Please provide information on the measures taken to increase the effectiveness of protection orders, including by extending their duration. It is also indicated that by 2013 no protection order had been issued. Please provide updated information on any protection order issued and whether there needs to be consent of the victim in order to issue a protection order. Please also indicate whether the State party is taking steps to specifically criminalize domestic violence.

29. Answer: The system of protection orders would refer to Act No. 85/2011. Under this Act, the police can issue a restraining order (prohibit a person from coming to close to another person, for a maximum period of one year) or order an offender in a domestic dispute to leave the home (maximum period of four weeks). A protection order can be renewed if the situation calls for it. A protection order issued by the police must be brought before a district court within three days of its issue. A decision taken by the police not to issue a protection order may be appealed to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It should be noted that the victim's consent is not essential for the issue of a protection order.

30. The Metropolitan Police in Iceland have issued protection orders (restraining orders) as follows from 2012;

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

31. The Ministry of the Interior is currently preparing an amendment to the General Penal Code, criminalizing domestic violence. The draft is currently going through public consultation and has been made available on the ministry's website.

32. Please provide information on the measures taken to open more emergency shelters and strengthen support services for women victims of violence, including migrant women, such 24-hour hotlines, rape crisis clinics, and psychological counselling. Please also explain whether the State party intends to reconsider its decision to dismantle the sex crime unit of the police in 2010 due to funding cuts and to absorb it into a unit dealing with common crimes such as murder and serious bodily harm.

33. Answer: On 19 December 2014, the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, Eygló Harðardóttir, signed an agreement with the Women's Refuge covering emergency accommodation for women victims, or suspected victims, of human trafficking. Under the agreement, the police, the local authorities' social service departments and other recognized actors are able to offer suspected victims of human trafficking shelter while their cases are under investigation and specialists from the welfare services can offer counselling and support. During the time in which they are placed in emergency shelter, a team of specialists will examine each woman's case and ensure that they are given appropriate assistance, security and protection after their stays in the Refuge.

34. During 2014 and 2015, the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing gave funding to the National Hospital (Landspítalinn) and the Akureyri Hospital to establish two new positions to engage psychologists to provide victims of violence with assistance and treatment, for example in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

35. On 18 December 2014, the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science signed a joint declaration on a package of measures against violence and its consequences. The declaration provided for greatly increased priority on collaboration and efforts to improve procedures where necessary, increased preventive efforts and awareness-raising among the public and those who, in the course of their work, deal with cases involving violence, whether they work in the educational system, the welfare system or the law-enforcement system. In June 2015 the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing appointed a pilot group for the project, consisting of representatives from three ministries which will ensure broad collaboration on measures against violence and its consequences. On 29 October 2015 the pilot group intends to hold a consultative meeting with professionals from all over the country; on the basis of this consultation, a four-year plan of action against violence in Icelandic society will be drawn up. The plan will include, amongst other things, preventive measures and awareness-raising activities and improvements in the procedure when cases are investigated. These measures are aimed at improving collaboration between the police, the education authorities, health services and social services. Emphasis will also be placed on support and protection for victims of violence.

36. The ministry's collaborative team has been in operation since 2013; its role is to monitor compliance with a coordinated overall policy on domestic violence, the making of collaboration agreements on specific services and the launching of experimental projects. Its role is also to establish permanent collaboration between the social services, the child protection authorities, the health services, the police, the Centre for Gender Equality and non-governmental organizations. The collaborative team has held courses all over Iceland on preventive measures and measures against domestic violence, and further courses are planned over the coming months. These are designed to share knowledge and set up procedural models aimed at improving investigation of cases relating to domestic violence by instituting more focused procedures by the police, reducing recidivism, improving statistical recording, establishing more efficient assistance for victims and perpetrators and making better use of remedies such as restricted access and exclusion orders.

37. The City of Reykjavík has no plans to establish more women's shelters in the city, which is where the only one in the country is located. The Women's Refuge has an emergency telephone service which is open round the clock every day.

38. A joint campaign by the City of Reykjavík, the Metropolitan Police and the Women's Refuge under the name Together against Violence (Saman gegn ofbeldi) has been in progress since 12 January 2015. The aim is to improve procedures in dealing with cases of domestic violence in order to ensure citizen's safety in the home, provide victims with better services and offer perpetrators treatment. It is also intended to improve the position of children in homes where violence is used. As "domestic violence" is defined not by the location where violent acts take place but rather by the relationship between perpetrator and victim, the centre of Reykjavík is the place where incidents of domestic violence are more likely to take place rather

than in any other specific area or suburb of the city. This campaign is focused specially on providing services to immigrant women and disabled victims. It includes support from social workers and psychological assistance for children who witness acts of violence or are legally domiciled with individuals who are victims or perpetrators of violence.

39. An emergency reception unit for rape victims is operated by the National Hospital (Landspítalinn).

40. According to information from the Office of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, a special team or department dealing exclusively with sexual offences will be in operation as from 1 November 2015.

41. Reportedly, disabled and migrant women are more exposed to violence than other women. Is there any systematic research on how gender and other grounds of discrimination interact in relation to being at risk of violence, including sexual violence? Please provide information on efforts to disseminate information on the rights of immigrant women on existing legal mechanisms and government services in an easily accessible way.

42. Answer: The Ministry of Welfare had a report prepared on violence against disabled women in 2013. At the end of 2014, MR-S (the Nordic Ministerial Committee dealing with Social Affairs and Health) approved a plan of action on disabled persons' affairs. One of the tasks it defined was the establishment of a team of experts on gender-based violence against disabled people (women, men, boys and girls) which was to submit its proposals and recommendations to the ministerial committee. The team has begun its work, and its proposals are awaited.

43. The annual report of Stígamót, a non-governmental organization which works to combat sexual violence and to give assistance to victims) for 2014 revealed that 94.6 per cent of those who sought its assistance that year were Icelandic. Also, a worker specializing in disabled persons' affairs joined the staff of Stígamót in 2014. Of those approaching Stígamót for the first time in 2014, 4.3 per cent had physical disabilities. It should be stressed that this is only an indication of the numbers of individuals with disabilities involved in cases of sexual violence: it is not based on a survey of all disabled persons.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

44. Please provide updated information on the implementation of the measures under the 2013-2016 National Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings, in particular the impact on women or girls, and on their results. Please also provide information on the number of reported cases of trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution and of investigations, prosecutions and convictions and on the penalties imposed on the clients and pimps. Please provide an impact assessment of the amendments to the General Penal Code in 2009 that made the purchasing of sexual services illegal, including data on the number of clients prosecuted.

45. Answer: The National Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings is under continuous implementation and the steering group established on the basis of it has prioritized awareness-raising and education. More than 30 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 and lawyers working with criminal cases.

The steering group includes representatives of the social welfare services, the police and the health services. More material and information has been promoted on the website of the Ministry of the Interior website: (www.innanrikisraduneyti.is/raduneyti/starfssvid/Mansal/handbaekur/).

46. The police initiated 11 trafficking investigations in 2014 compared to 12 in 2013. No prosecutions or convictions were delivered during 2013 and 2014. In 2013, 175 prostitution cases were investigated by the police; in 2014 the figure was 13.

47. No impact assessment of the amendments to the General Penal Code in 2009 has been carried out but it is safe to say that the amendments have viewed as a positive step to combat prostitution.

48. The follow-up report mentions that there are no special legal provisions on the protection of victims or witnesses of human trafficking. Please provide information on the assessment undertaken by the Ministry of Interior in this regard and indicate the measures taken or envisaged to address this problem. Please also provide information on measures taken to strengthen cooperation among the police and social and healthcare authorities in the field of human trafficking.

49. Answer: The Foreign Nationals Act contains special provisions for victims of human trafficking, see article 12 h and 12 i (<http://eng.innanrikisraduneyti.is/laws-and-regulations/english/foreigners/nr/105>). As regards physical protection and safe house the Ministry of Welfare has made an agreement with the Women's Shelter in Reykjavík to house and protect all female and child victims of trafficking. As regards witness protection the National Police Commissioner is still assessing the need and measures to be taken. As in all other cases, the police will provide protection when needed.

50. As regards measures to strengthen cooperation among the police and the social and healthcare authorities, reference is made to the steering group mentioned in the answer to question No. 10.

51. Please provide updated information on the proposal made in Parliament in late 2013 for the revision of rules regarding the granting of operating licences for restaurants in order to prevent so-called "champagne clubs". Please also indicate the measures taken to identify and regulate new platforms of prostitution, such as internet dating sites, local bars and restaurants. What steps have been taken to provide alternative income opportunities for women who want to leave prostitution?

52. The Metropolitan Police are currently undergoing restructuring, including looking into establishing a special investigation unit to target human trafficking and prostitution. This would enhance the police's capacity to identify new platforms of prostitution and to deal with them accordingly.

Participation in public life and economic decision-making

53. Considering the low representation of women in the national police force, please indicate whether the State party plans to adopt measures, including temporary special measures in line with article 4 of the Convention and General Recommendation No. 25 (1988) on temporary special measures, to promote the representation of women, including women belonging to ethnic minorities and women with disabilities, in Parliament, local governments, the judiciary, the police and the foreign service, in particular at decision-making levels.

54. Answer: No specific measures have been established. However as regards the police, the Ministry of the Interior requested all police commissioners has in autumn 2015 to prepare an action plan within their organizations aimed at promoting professional evolution of women police officers with a view to increasing and promoting their representation in police administration. The National Police Commissioner will follow up on that project. Furthermore the National Police Academy has in recent years placed special emphasis on recruiting more women.

Education

55. The State report indicates that regarding education and training, boys and girls still make gender-segregated choices. Please provide information on any measures taken to eliminate gender-stereotyped vocational and educational orientation of boys and girls. Please explain whether the State party considers introducing education on human rights, including on gender equality, as well as on age-appropriate education on sexuality, responsible sexual behaviour and reproductive health and rights in school curricula. Please provide information on access by migrant girls to primary and secondary school education, on the number of enrolment, attendance, drop outs and success rate.

56. Answer: According to the findings of studies and surveys, boys' and girls' educational and vocational choices are still to a large extent traditional. It has been decided to embark on a project mounted jointly by the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the action group on equal pay. This will have a dual aim: firstly, to consult interested parties with a view to gathering information for the preparation of an action plan on ways of reducing gender-stereotyped educational and vocational choices, and secondly to make available practical information and guidance that may be of use to educational institutions, professional associations and employers in implementing the action plan.

57. The project will involve gathering information and charting out the emphases expressed by professional associations, interest groups, at primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions and experts in the field of gender equality. This is a qualitative research project and information will be gathered from the aforementioned parties through interviews. It will then be analysed with the aim of identifying the parties main emphases, their willingness to act, ideas regarding methods and possible obstacles.

58. This information will be correlated with theoretical knowledge and experience of comparable projects, for example in the other Nordic Countries, and the outcome will be submitted in the form of proposals on individual measures and collaborative ventures. Attempts will also be made to foresee the impact on the positions of men and women on the labour market. It is hoped that the project will encourage comprehensive and efficient policymaking to counteract gender-based choices in education and careers. Such policymaking must be based on measurable aims regarding increases in the numbers of women entering traditionally male professions and vice versa and convincing pupils that they are really able to choose study subjects and jobs irrespective of their sex.

59. It is envisaged that two things will come out of the project. One will be an Electronic manual or homepage containing statistical data on gender-based choices in education and vocations, with a list of practical projects, methods and remedies for educational institutions, professional associations and the social partners, together

with practical instructions on how to approach project and implement them successfully. The other thing to emerge from the project will be a report summarizing all available knowledge and proposals that can be used by an action group representing the Government and the social partners in preparing a plan of action on methods of breaking up the gender-based pattern of choice in education and careers.

Employment

60. The report states that there is a persistent gender wage gap in the State party. Please explain if the State party considers imposing any sanctions on employers for breaches of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value. Please provide updated information on the implementation of the Plan of Action and Equal Pay Standard and measures taken to reduce the wage gap. Please also explain why the minimum employees required to implement the 40 per cent gender quota is set rather high, to 50 employees, given the Icelandic context.

61. Answer: The Government extended the appointment period of the Action Group on Equal Pay until the end of 2016. The Action Group is to submit two plans of action as follows which are designed to reduce the gender pay gap. Firstly a plan of action on the integration of family and working life and secondly plan of action on ways of breaking up gender-based choices in education and careers.

62. The action group's letter of appointment listed a large number of tasks, some of which have already been implemented. They have been aimed at gathering information for the action plans that the task force is to submit by the end of 2016.

63. In addition, the action group received a grant from the Gender Equality Action Fund to work at a project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on breaking up gender-based choices in education and careers. The aim of this project is to gather information on factors influencing gender-based choices of education and careers and how a 'toolkit'/homepage can be prepared to make it easier for professional associations and educational institutions to attract women to enter traditionally male occupations and vice versa.

64. A working group representing the Government and the social partners established two specialist teams with representatives from each party to define and design two studies on the gender pay gap and means of breaking up gender segregation on the labour market. Findings of the studies were unveiled at a meeting on 20 May 2015. These revealed that the gender pay gap has been closing, and that the main causes of the gap lie in the gender-divisions on the labour market, i.e. the fact that in certain occupations, individuals of either sex are distinctly in the majority. The findings of these studies will be used in drawing up the action plans referred to above.

65. The Minister of Social Affairs and Housing has drawn attention to the importance of observing an Equal Pay Day, as is done in many other parts of the Nordic countries and in the EU; this day is used for publicity and awareness-raising among the public regarding wage equality issues and the difference in the standing of men and women on the labour market. It has been proposed that on such a day, it would be possible to draw special attention to those undertakings and institutions that have adopted the Equal Pay Systems Standard and received certification for doing so. No day has yet been chosen but a memo with suggestions on the choice of a date will be submitted by the Action Group on Equal Pay to the Government.

66. The Equal Pay Systems Standard is a management standard, and as such is comparable with other management standards such as the ISO 9001 Quality Assurance Standard. It is a managerial tool that enables undertakings and institutions to adopt procedures that ensure that equal remuneration is paid for equal work, or work of equal value. As it is the first standard of its kind — possibly even the first of its kind in the world — it was decided to set up an experimental project before it was adopted.

67. The emphasis has been on a practical approach so as to ensure that the introduction of the standard will be accessible to as many users as possible. To ensure that as many Icelandic workplaces as possible will be interested in implementing the standard, the Action Group on Equal Pay is currently developing tools for implementation such as check lists, suitability matrices, and calculation models for job classification, aiming at making them generally accessible on the Internet — with a special homepage of the Equal Pay Management standard.

68. Workshops were also developed for those who intend to introduce the Equal Pay Systems Standard, or who are considering the possibility of doing so. In this connection, a declaration of intent was signed by all the organizations of the social partners on collaboration between their educational centres on such workshops. The first workshops were held at the end of April and May 2015. They were so well attended that more have been planned for later this year.

69. The task force also held a design competition for an ‘equal pay logo’ which will be presented to those workplaces that meet the requirements of the standard and are certified following inspection.

70. When the certification bodies which have applied for accreditation have received it, it should be possible to certify the first workplaces and the first state institutions are expected to be certified next spring (2016). Thereafter, the Government of Iceland, together with the National Association of Local Authorities and Business Iceland, will launch a special campaign to promote and ensure a wide implementation of the Equal-Pay Management Standard and its certification among Icelandic businesses and institutions. This cooperation will involve sending instructions to all the relevant state institutions, municipalities and businesses which essentially includes all employers in Iceland, to implement the standard and seek a certification thereof. The Equal Pay Standard project is an important step towards fulfilling the Government’s commitment to eliminate the gender pay gap before 2022.

71. Please provide information on the family policy for the period up to 2020 and explain how it will promote a balance between working life and family life and equal sharing of the responsibilities by both parents in relation to housework and care of children. Please explain if any consideration has been given to synchronizing parents’ holidays and working hours with day care and school hours for children. Please indicate whether the extension of the total parental leave period from 9 to 12 months has been introduced.

72. Answer: Parents in Iceland are entitled to 9 months parental (maternity and paternity) leave. The working week is reckoned as 40 hours, normally in the form of eight hours’ work per day from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Annual leave entitlement according to collective agreements consists of 24-30 working days.

73. The parental leave entitlement is divided between the mother and the father with 3 months reserved exclusively for the mother, 3 for the father and the remaining 3 to

be disposed in any way they wish. There is no guarantee of a place in nursery school (preschool) for the child when parental leave ends; thus, it falls to the parents to bridge the gap until the child is admitted to nursery school. They do this in various ways: by taking unpaid leave from employment, by having relatives take care of the child or by using the services of 'day-care parents'. These operate in their own homes or other premises and have to meet the requirements of regulations on day-care parents in private homes. Nursery schools are run by the municipalities according to law. Under the law, they have a large amount of independence, and when children are admitted to nursery school varies from one municipality to another, but this generally happens when they reach the age of 18-24 months. Places in nursery schools are normally offered for up to 9.5 hours per day. Many nursery schools close for as long as 4 weeks in the summer, during which parents either have to take their own holiday leave or find other solutions. In addition to these summer closures, nursery schools close for 'planning days'; the number varies from one municipality to another, but in the largest, Reykjavík, there are six such days each year.

74. Children enter junior school (the only school level that is compulsory) in the autumn of the year in which they turn six. The school day for the youngest children starts shortly after 8 a.m. and ends shortly after 1 p.m. The summer school holidays last for about 12 weeks (60 working days). In addition, the junior schools have a winter break of 4-5 working days, and Christmas and Easter holidays. There are about 4-5 staff working days in the junior schools, on which there is no teaching. The law lays down provisions on the minimum number of school days, but does not specify any maximum number. There has been some discussion of whether the number of weeks of teaching in the junior schools could be increased and the number of staff working days reduced. However, this discussion has never really got off the ground because these matters form part of the teachers' collective agreements. No overall policy has been set forth in response to the closure of nursery schools during the summer; in some municipalities, these closures are part of the strategy for balancing the municipal budget.

75. There is no legal requirement regarding the provision of extra-curricular activities for schoolchildren; nevertheless the schools in most municipalities offer extra-curricular activities for children aged 6-9 after school hours and they are able to stay there until as late as 5 p.m. according to their individual requirements. Some municipalities also offer extra-curricular activities for older schoolchildren. How extracurricular activities fit in with the rest of the children's school day varies from place to place. In some municipalities they follow straight on from the school day but in others there is a gap between school hours and the extra-curricular programme. Whether transport is provided between the schools and the places where extra-curricular activities take place varies from one municipality to another and may also depend on the nature of the extra-curricular activities involved. The extra-curricular activities offered, both on the school premises and elsewhere, go some way towards meeting the needs of families in which both parents work outside the home. It is clear, however, that many municipalities need to do more to coordinate these activities so as to guarantee supervision and continuity between school and extra-curricular activities during the time when parents are at work. The situation varies from one municipality to the next; the draft Family Policy for 2015-2020 proposes some measures designed to improve matters and so make it easier for parents to balance work and family life.

76. The main obstacle when it comes to balancing work and family life, and parental responsibility for looking after children in times when they are not in school lies, on the one hand, in the gap between the end of parental leave and admission to nursery school and on the other in the fact that the number of vacation (leave) days to which parents are entitled is far lower than the annual junior schools summer holidays plus the staff working days (preparation days) in junior schools and nursery schools plus other holidays such as Christmas, Easter and winter holidays.

77. A draft parliamentary resolution on a family policy up to 2020 is on the agenda for the current session of the Althingi (2015-16). It is intended to secure a family-friendly society in which children and families with young children have equal opportunities compared with other groups, and enjoy security and the exercise of their legally protected rights. The draft policy is accompanied by a plan of action with 32 measures intended to achieve these targets. Many of the measures address the balance between work and family life and the apportionment of equal responsibilities between both parents for the support of the family, housework and the care of children.

78. When it comes to the financial standing of families with children, measures must be taken to ensure that no child suffers from poverty or social exclusion and that parents' limited resources should not have a serious negative impact on children. It is proposed in the draft resolution that child insurance be established, with payments made in respect of each child in households with incomes beneath a certain minimum; this would be aimed at simplifying the benefit system and ensuring that children in low-income families received support. In January 2015 the Welfare Watch published proposals on methods of eradicating poverty, including the payment of non-income-related child benefit, with further child insurance to guarantee that all families with children would receive a prescribed minimum level of support, irrespective of the sources of their income. These proposals are designed to improve the position of the groups in society in the lowest income brackets, and should therefore be of benefit to single parents (cf. Question No. 17). The Welfare Watch goes further in its proposals, calling for the definition of a minimum support figure or reference frame with the aim of eradicating poverty. Other proposals aimed at giving families with children a secure economic basis are that housing benefit be 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. Also it is proposed that the Children Act be revised with a view to having child maintenance arrangements meet the needs of all children and their parents in a fair manner. The Welfare Watch endorses this idea, and proposes additionally that funding be channelled into the construction of socially assisted housing and that municipal authorities have accommodation available for rent by lower-income families and individuals so as to put renters in a more secure position.

79. The aim of the Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Act, which was passed in 2000, is to guarantee that infant children spend time both with their fathers and their mothers and to give both women and men an opportunity to balance the demands of family and work, so promoting gender equality. The act ensures fathers' entitlement to paternity leave, which enhances their scope for caring for their children and doing housework, in addition to which the equal rights of men and women to this leave promotes gender equality on the labour market. Breaking up the conservative pattern of gender roles and having children see their parents working

together in the home encourages gender equality in the long term. Ever since the act was passed in 2000, parents have generally availed themselves of their right to leave following the birth of their children. Some amendments have, however, been made to the act regarding the amount of payments and the length of the reference periods for establishing average wages and the length of the leave period. At present, monthly payments from the Parental Leave Fund to fully employed parents during their parental leave periods come to 80 per cent of their average gross earnings or calculated remuneration during the reference period for children born in 2015 or later, though they are subject to a ceiling of ISK 370,000. The proportion of fathers who have used part of the parents' joint entitlement period has declined since 2009; before that, in the years 2001-08, it grew steadily. The proportion of fathers who do not utilize their full entitlement to three months' paternity leave, on the other hand, has risen since the act was passed, the most noticeable increase taking place following the economic collapse of autumn 2008.

80. The report submitted in May 2015 by a task force appointed by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science to examine the use made of nursery schools following the end of parental leave states that the period following the 9-month parental leave period until most children are guaranteed places in nursery school at the age of 2 years is a time of some uncertainty. Many parents have to find a solution to the question of who is to see to the daytime care of their child while they are at work. The report estimates that, allowing for the 9-month parental leave allowance, it may be necessary for a quarter of children to be placed in day-care during their first year of life; in 2013, 2,017 children aged 0-2 were in the care of day-parents. The average number of births per year in Iceland is about 4,500. The current gap in care solutions between the end of parental leave and admission to nursery school has a negative impact on gender equality: studies have shown that women generally bridge this gap and undertake greater responsibility for child care by staying at home after the end of their traditional parental leave periods. They are also more likely to adjust their participation in the labour market to meet family circumstances by reducing their job proportions, while fathers tend more to arrange their care-giving functions according to the circumstances at their workplaces. Nevertheless, the number of fathers who arrange their work engagement to meet situations that may arise at home between the end of parental leave and the child's admission to nursery school has risen in the past few years.

81. Work is in progress on finding ways to achieve the aim of the Parental Leave Act and how to eradicate the uncertainty that may be created in view of the current gap between the end of parental leave and the child's admission to nursery school.

82. The Minister of Social Affairs and Housing has also appointed a task force to formulate future policy on parental leave in Iceland. The force's letter of appointment states that it is to examine how the aims of the Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Act can best be secured as regards guaranteeing the child the chance to be together with both parents while also enabling parents to balance the demands of family life and work. The letter also states that attention is to be given to how to reinstate the main aim of the parental leave system to minimize the disruption of household earnings when parents take a break from work.

83. Reportedly, women account for 91 per cent of all single parents and 77 per cent of these single parents suffer severe economic difficulties. Please indicate the

measures taken by the State party to mitigate the reported deterioration of the financial situation of single women and single mothers.

84. Answer: Comparison of the proportions of those who suffer severe economic difficulties according to the household type (family structure) shows that single-parent households were in the majority: in 2014, over 21 per cent of single-parent households were in this category.

Table 1

Percentage of households facing severe economic difficulties, by household type, 2014:*

<i>Household type</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>95% confidence interval (CI)</i>
1 parent, 1 or more children	21.2	8.7
2 parents, 1 child	1.1	1.3
2 parents, 2 children	4.8	2.4
2 parents, >2 children	6.1	3.3

* *Source:* Statistics Iceland. (2015, March). Hagtíðindi. Laun, tekjur og vinnumarkaður. 2015:2.

85. Comparison of the proportions of those who are classified as having income below the poverty line by household type reveals an even greater difference: over 22 per cent of single parent homes were in this category in 2014.

Table 2

Percentage of households with income under the poverty line, by household type 2014.*

<i>Household type</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>95% confidence interval (CI)</i>
1 parent, 1 or more children	22.3	7.3
2 parents, 1 child	6.2	2.8
2 parents, 2 children	4.0	2.0
2 parents, >2 children	9.5	3.7

* *Source:* Statistics Iceland (n.d.). Talnaefni. Accessed at <http://www.hagstofa.is/talnaefni/samfelag/laun-og-tekjur/tekjudreifing/>.

86. The level of participation in paid employment has always been high in Iceland (around 80 per cent or over), and the Icelandic labour market has long distinguished itself for the high proportion of women in employment, which is among the highest in international rankings. In 2014, involvement rates in the labour market stood at 84.7 per cent for men and 78.2 per cent for women, the rate for women having risen steadily in recent decades. A higher proportion of women (about one-third) are in part-time jobs, the figure for men being 13.5 per cent; the number of women

working full-time has risen in the past ten years while the number of men in full employment has fallen.

87. Although some important steps have been taken towards eradicating gender-based wage differentials, efforts in this direction have not been completely successful and the difference, taking other factors into consideration, is currently close to 5 per cent, the advantage lying with men. Although the gap has narrowed over the past few years and decades, full gender equality does not yet reign on the labour market. Women attend more to child care and housework than men, though the difference is now less marked than it used to be. This division of roles in turn hampers women's professional advancement.

88. Examples of measures taken by the Government to facilitate parents to balance the demands of family and career are: the lengthening of maternity/paternity leave, whole-day places in nursery schools and offers of various types of extra-curricular activities for children after the end of the normal school day. These measures are of benefit to all parents, i.e. both single parents and others, and in addition, children of single parents have priority when it comes to places in nursery schools and extra-curricular care centres in some municipal areas. Furthermore, attention is drawn to measures in the family policy (see the reply to Question No. 16) designed to make it easier for parents to balance the demands of family and career, so increasing their involvement in the labour market.

89. Many studies have found that the main explanation for the gender-based wage gap lies in the gender divide on the labour market. Amongst other things, it has been pointed out that the stereotyped roles of men and women influence career choices. This is found in the fact that women have been in the great majority of those who enter traditional women's jobs such as caregiving, while men have tended to be attracted to jobs connected with various industries and crafts. Nonetheless, in recent decades various stereotypes have been slowly and steadily eroded. It is the Government's policy to break down the traditional gender divisions on the labour market. At the end of 2012 a task force consisting of representatives of the Government and the social partners was appointed to examine gender equality in wages; one of the main challenges here is to produce plans of action on methods of breaking up the traditional patterns in choices of study and career. Proposals have been made on measures to promote greater equality on the labour market. One of these is to put more work into job introductions at the junior (compulsory; up to age 16) school and senior school levels; another is to open a web site to host information about job vacancies and advice to individuals and institutions in order to contribute to the breaking down of the gender divisions on the labour market.

90. Various labour-market-related remedial measures have been established to promote gender equality on the labour market. Grants have been made to women all over Iceland who have promising business ideas since 1991. The sum of ISK 50 million is now available each year for this purpose. Following the rise in unemployment after 2008 it was decided to make a substantial increase in the number of job-related labour-market remedies. These included paying employers grants for taking on job-seekers, and as a result there was some increase of the number of job-seekers who entered into these remedial measures in 2009-2011. The programme A Working Way was set up in 2012. This was designed specifically to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment and it had a certain amount of impact. The programme Support was launched in 2013; this was intended specifically to activate

job-seekers who had been unemployed for long periods and had fully utilized their entitlement to receive unemployment benefits, so preventing these people from becoming unfit for work in the long term.

91. In addition, various other campaigns and programmes have been launched since the end of 2009. Counselling services have been expanded, more basic remedial measures have been added (such as guidance in the production of CVs and methods of seeking employment), job-seekers have been offered various practical courses including computer courses, training courses on working machinery and other vocational training. Assistance has been offered with various courses of study at upper-senior and university (post-secondary) level, in particular employment-related measures such as vocational rehabilitation and vocational training. Special projects have been launched for various age-groups, such as Youth to Action for people aged 16-29 and Dare for job-seekers aged 30 and older. Finally, mention should be made of the scheme Education is a Working Option, which was launched in 2011. Under it, job-seekers had the opportunity of pursuing full-time studies for one semester without this having any impact on their entitlement to unemployment benefit payments from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. In the years 2009-2013, a total of 8,800 job-seekers were taken on under labour-market measures, either in the private sector or the public. Of these, about 6,500 (i.e. 74 per cent) were not registered as being unemployed three months after their contracts ended. A project called the Women's Workshop is an example of a measure designed specifically to improve the position of single mothers. It has been in operation since 2001 and is run jointly by the Social Security Institute and the City of Reykjavík. The aim of the Women's Workshop is to support single mothers who have not been on the job market for some time and to encourage them to take steps to improve their position.

92. In addition to the remedial measures listed above, an important project called Tinna is being prepared. It is in the spirit of the family policy mentioned in the reply to Question No. 16 and is aimed at improving the position of single parents who receive financial assistance, and of their children. Consideration is being given to making Tinna a project of at least five years' duration involving many-faceted support, e.g. to enable participants to pursue education or vocational training so as to give young unmarried mothers broader choices regarding studies and employment. It would involve an integrated programme of education and/or vocational training, financial support, assistance with housing, counselling on the upbringing of children and specialist services. The remedies applied would be individually tailored, and it is envisaged that 15-20 single parents could be referred to an experimental scheme each year. It is important that the project be headed by someone whose energies would be directed solely to serving the needs of the women who participated in it.

93. In addition to the labour-market-related measures aimed at improving the financial position of single women and mothers, there are various types of family benefit that take account of the marital status of the breadwinner in households where there are children and are designed specifically to alleviate poverty in single-parent homes. Child benefit in Iceland is income-related and the rate paid to single parents is considerably higher. Single parents with two or more children under the age of 18 are entitled to a mother's or father's allowance, irrespective of their earnings. Student loans to single parents are higher than to others. Interest benefit is paid to those who live in their own homes and is intended to cover interest payments (on housing loans); higher rates of interest benefit are paid to single parents than to childless single persons, if earnings and assets are taken into account. Child pensions are paid

to all children under the age of 18 if either parent is deceased or receiving disability benefit, and at double the rate if both parents are deceased or receiving disability benefit. Finally, child pension is also paid for children whose paternity is not established and for children of old-age pensioners and prisoners.

Health

94. In light of the relatively high number of pregnancies and abortions among girls under eighteen, please provide information on any measures taken to reduce early pregnancies and abortions. Please indicate what measures the State party is implementing to ensure that there is wide access, including by migrant women, to sex education, family planning information and services, as well as to contraceptives, and to reintegration into education after giving birth and trends over time.

95. Answer: In the view of the Directorate of Health, access to contraception (both in the form of hormonal medication and condoms) is good. There will always be differences of opinion as to whether the cost of contraceptives could be a factor limiting their use, but up to now the Government has not considered there is any reason to subsidize them. Sex education is generally well covered in the primary (compulsory, to age 16) schools, both by teachers and by nurses, and there is a varied range of educational material available for this age group. Regarding children at the secondary school level (age 16+), education is perhaps not as structured but on the other hand there is also a large amount of awareness-raising material of other types available. Specialists are frequently brought in to give sex-education talks to this group in the senior schools.

96. In the light of this question, the Directorate of Health considered it proper to examine statistics from the past few years to form an idea of the trend regarding pregnancies and abortions.

Abortions in Iceland

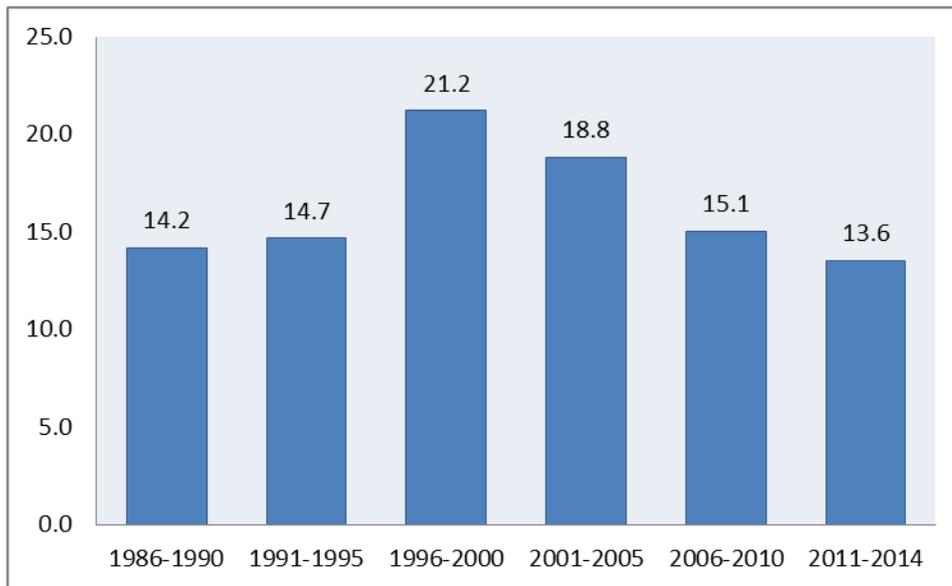
97. In 2014, 951 abortions were performed in Iceland, i.e. 12.2 per 1,000 women of reproductive age — 15-49 years — and 217.4 per 1,000 live births. Abortion figures have remained reasonably steady recently: 951-981 per year over the past seven years.

98. For purposes of international comparison, Iceland tends to take the other Nordic countries as points of reference. The report 'Aborter i Norden 2013' presents comparative statistics for the Nordic countries up to 2013. That year, the rate per 1,000 women of reproductive age was lowest in Finland (8.7) and highest in Sweden (17.5). In Iceland 12.5 abortions were performed per 1,000 women aged 15-49, which was slightly below the Nordic average of 13.5.

Reduction in abortions in the youngest age group

99. The past two decades have seen a considerable fall in the number of abortions in the youngest age group. In 2014, 12.4 out of every 1,000 girls aged 15-19 underwent abortions. On average, 15.1 abortions were performed each year for every 10,000 girls in the same age-group in the period 2006-2010, against 18.8, on average, in 2001-2005 and 21.2 per year in the period 1996-2000.

Picture
Abortions per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 (average per year)



100. A feature shared by the Nordic countries is that there has been a fall in the number of abortions performed on girls under the age of 20. The Nordic average in 2013 was 14.4 per 1,000 girls aged under 20; ten years earlier, in 2003, the corresponding figure was 18.7. The frequency in the youngest age-group in 2013 was lowest in Norway (10.1) and highest in Sweden (19.3). In Iceland, 13.1 girls out of every 1,000 aged 15-19 underwent abortions in 2013, which was lower than the Nordic average of 14.4.

Births: Live births by age of mother, 1971-2014

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Under 15	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
15	3	1	1	0	0	2	0	5	2	0	0
16	4	10	6	8	11	7	9	2	6	2	4
17	12	17	26	34	19	26	28	15	18	17	4
18	38	44	49	46	49	50	45	38	28	28	28
19	72	79	68	72	89	85	67	64	74	34	47
Total	131	151	150	160	168	170	150	124	128	81	84

Source: Statistics Iceland.

Disadvantaged groups of women

101. Please provide information on specific measures taken by the State party to ensure gender equality for women, who experience intersectional discrimination based on any kind of factor in all areas covered under the Convention. Please provide information on access by immigrant women and women with disabilities to

all the rights enshrined in the Convention. Please inform the Committee as to whether the State party is considering ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

102. Answer: Iceland is working on the ratification of the UN-CRPD by completing the last of the required changes to the legal framework and establishing the necessary monitoring bodies in compliance with article 33 of the UN-CRPD. The focus will be on ratifying the Convention itself first before it will be decided whether or not the Optional Protocol will be ratified. According to the Act on the Protection of the Rights of Disabled Persons No. 88/2011, all persons with disabilities have access to the assistance of special Rights protection officers, who are employed by the Ministry of Welfare, and whose role is to assist persons with disabilities in matters concerning their rights. For further information on the role and function of the Rights protection officers: http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/media/acrobat-enskar_sidur/Act-on-the-protection-of-the-rights-of-disabled-persons-No-88-2011.pdf.

103. A study was made by the Women's Refuge, an NGO, in 2009 of the situation of those women of foreign origin, living in Iceland, who sought assistance in the Reykjavik Women's Refuge between 1 October 2007 and 1 June 2009. Sixty-seven women participated in the study, 27 of them from within the European Economic Area (EEA) and 40 from outside it. The findings show that there was a large difference in legal status and experience according to the women's countries of origin, those who came from countries within the EEA being in a considerably better position than those from outside it. In some cases, the issue of visas to those from outside the EEA depended on their husbands, making them more vulnerable to violence. Ignorance and language barriers gave rise to abuse and sometimes isolation. It has been established that more than one foreign woman fled to the Women's Refuge from the same man, and some men seem systematically to pick women from outside the EEA as their poor legal position makes them easier victims for their violence. The women participating in this study were by and large satisfied with the services of those in charge of their affairs in Iceland. The most negative experience, according to the women, was the wait for final decisions in their cases regarding permit to stay in Iceland and/or divorces. Emotional stress and fatigue weighed heavily on them, in addition to grave concern about the future. They were ready to endure much hardship for the sake of their children, even returning to their violent husbands. The children were under great duress: often they were burdened with a position as interpreter and intermediary between their mothers and Icelandic society. This placed responsibility on their shoulders beyond what should be expected of such young individuals and exposed them to knowledge they should be spared witnessing.

104. Furthermore, article 13 of the Foreign Nationals Act, No. 96/2002, states that if a marriage, registered partnership or co-habitational relationship is dissolved because the foreign national or his or her child has met with abuse or violence in the relationship, then under special circumstances and if cogent consideration of fairness favour such a course of action, a temporary residence permit issued under the article may be extended even though the premises for residence in Iceland have changed, providing that the conditions of the first paragraph of article 11 are met, which are:

(a) the foreign national's support, health insurance and accommodation are secure in accordance with further rules set by the Minister,

(b) the foreign national meets the requirements for a temporary residence permit as set forth in the Act and other regulations under the first paragraph of article 3,

(c) the foreign national consents to undergo a medical examination within two weeks of arrival in Iceland in accordance with current legislation and the instructions of the health authorities, and

(d) no circumstances obtain which could result in the foreign national's being refused entry into Iceland or residence in the country under other articles of this Act.

105. In these cases, factors including the length of the marriage, registered partnership or cohabitational relationship and the connections that the foreign national has with Iceland are to be taken into consideration. A temporary residence permit issued to a family member under this article may constitute the basis for a permanent residence permit unless the foreign national from whom the foreign national derives his or her entitlement holds a temporary residence permit that does not constitute such a basis.

106. Reportedly, 40 per cent of Icelandic residents of foreign background feel discriminated against, particularly in the workplace. Please provide information on the specific situation of women of foreign background and measures taken to enable women of foreign origin to participate fully in economic, social, public and political life.

107. A few years ago, the Centre for Gender Equality published a booklet entitled "Your Rights. Important information for women of foreign origin in Iceland". This was published with support from the EU Progress Fund and in collaboration with the Ministry of Welfare. It has been reprinted again and again and the text was revised in 2014. It contains information of various types on the Icelandic justice system and Icelandic society, and also on gender equality, residence permits, separation and divorce, custody of children, parent-child access rights and finances, amongst other things. It also gives information on assistance, e.g. the addresses, telephone numbers and homepages of institutions and NGOs. The booklet is published in six languages in addition to Icelandic. It is available at the Centre for Gender Equality, at district commissioners' offices and municipal offices all over the countries. It is also accessible on-line via the homepage of the Centre for Gender Equality.

108. The Multicultural Centre has also provided information of various types for immigrants, including such matters as public administration, family affairs, education and the school system, finance and the health services. For example, under the heading The Family there is a discussion of various family types, the Marriage Act and the rules on divorce, the rights of homosexuals and single parents. Also to be found there is information on maternity, paternity and parental leave, child maintenance payments and child benefit payments. Space does not permit a full description of the many items of practical information provided there; reference is made to the homepage of the Multicultural Centre (mcc.is).

109. The Icelandic Human Rights Centre provides immigrants with legal counselling under an agreement with the Ministry of Welfare and similar arrangements exist in 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 main town in the north of the country), the International Centre provides information on various aspects of life and society in Iceland. All this information is similar to that which is available through the homepage of the Multicultural Centre, which is referred to above.