

**Iceland's response to the Questionnaire on Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the Twenty-Third Special session of the General Assembly (2000). For preparation of regional review and appraisals in the context of the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2010.**

**Part One: The major overall achievements and obstacles**

The principle of equality is specifically addressed in a provision in the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland (see Article 65 of the Constitution, No. 33/1944, *cf.* the Constitutional Law Act, No. 97/1995), stating that men and women are to have equal rights in every respect. Iceland has also had a special statute intended to ensure equality between women and men and their equal status in all respects since 1976. In February 2008 a new Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, (No. 10/2008) was passed by Althingi (the Parliament of Iceland). Included in the Act are actions to implement and monitor the policy represented, including a parliamentary resolution on a gender equality action plan, which is reported every two years. With the new Act gender mainstreaming has been defined within the framework of Icelandic law. The act is partly published in Part Three of this report.

Several amendments have been made to the General Penal Code No. 19/1940 in order to protect victims of gender based and sexual violence.

Althingi (the Parliament of Iceland) adopted in 2005 amendments to the Code prohibiting circumcision of women or girls in childhood.

In 2006 the Parliament adopted amendments to the provisions of the Code dealing with domestic violence. The bill was part of the campaign by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights against violence in close relationships. The aim of the amendments was to make the legal remedies available in cases of domestic violence more effective. It was considered necessary that Icelandic legislation reflected more clearly the view of the legislature, which was that offences committed between persons in an intimate relationship are of a special nature. The new legislation introduces heavier punishments in cases where it is considered that the close relationship between the perpetrator and the victim has led to gross violations. Furthermore, new provisions were introduced providing for up to two years' imprisonment in cases where a person insults or vilifies his or her spouse or former spouse, child or another person closely related to the perpetrator and the action is seen as constituting gross defamation. The intention behind the enactment of this new provision was to give a clearer embodiment to the provision for punishment that had already existed in the first paragraph of Article 191 of the Code. The aim was also to give individuals better protection against offences committed by closely related persons through marriage or within the family and to give better protection against gross defamation so as to make it more realistic to achieve the procedural and political legal aims that it is normal to apply in this context.

In 2007 the Parliament adopted amendments to the General Penal Code dealing with sexual offences. Amendments were made to Articles 194-199 of the Code, covering rape and other offences against the sexual freedom of the individual (*cf.* Article 205) and also Articles 200-

202, dealing with sexual offences against children (*cf.* Article 204). One of the reasons for the review of these provisions was the public discussion that had taken place concerning sexual abuse of children and gender-based violence. Increasing criticism of some of the provisions had been expressed, as it was felt that they did not give the victims sufficient legal protection, and that they embodied outdated attitudes towards women. When the legislation was drafted, attention was given to studies which dealt both with the legislation itself and its application. Secondly, attention was given to surveys of legislation covering sexual offences in other countries, and thirdly, data from various social and criminological studies was taken into consideration. Finally, steps were taken to take note of the experience of various parties who had worked with victims of offences of this type.

One of the innovations introduced into the Code was a broadening of the definition of rape, with the result that “rape” in Article 194 of the Code now includes other forms of sexual coercion and exploitation of the victim’s poor mental condition or inability to resist the action or to realize its significance. As a result of the amendment, offences in this category now carry far heavier punishments than before: imprisonment of 1-16 years, instead of a maximum of six years previously.

In 2009 the Parliament adopted amendments to the General Penal Code, dealing with prostitution, making the purchasing of sexual services illegal. Those caught paying for prostitution can face a fine or up to one year in prison. Before this change in the legislation, selling and buying sexual services was legal in Iceland. Selling sex was illegal in the country until 2007, when a change in the General Penal Code decriminalized prostitution. Profiting from prostitution of others continued to be illegal.

Iceland has included the Millennium Development Goals in its developmental work. The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) has successfully implemented gender mainstreaming in to its day to day work and has published a gender equality policy that is active in all their missions. Iceland itself has reached the goals put forward in MDG3 and has extensive data available to monitor the achievements. For example women hold 43% of seats in Parliament after the last election in April 2009. The Icelandic government is led by the first woman to become Prime Minister and 50% of the ministers are women. These recent developments have brought Iceland to first place on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index for 2009.

However, the gender pay gap in Iceland is still a fact. An extensive research in 2006 shows that women earn 15.7% less than men. In this research four background variables were taken in to account: profession, age, period of employment and working hours. If income is looked at regardless of other factors, women earn 61.3% of what men earn. In the year 1980 the same figure was 46.6%, in 1995 it was 52%, and in 2000 it was 55.3%. If the different working hours of men and women are taken into consideration the difference is somewhat less. In the year 1995 women earned 75% of what men earned. In 2000 the figure was 79% and in 2007 it was 80%.

The first legislation with the aim to correct the gender pay gap was passed in 1961 and in the new law from 2008 the provisions on equal pay have been strengthened. This is however not

enough. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, together with the Confederation of Trade Unions in Iceland and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers, are cooperating with Icelandic Standards (IST) to produce an Equal Pay Standard. The idea is to create a system that can confirm that women and men working for the same employer are paid equal wages and enjoy equal terms of employment for the same jobs and jobs of equal value. This concept is a guiding principle in gender equality acts all over the world and a part of many international contracts, both within the UN (such as CEDAW), the EU and EEA (European Economic Area). It is therefore anticipated that this standard will prove useful for many other countries.

Gender mainstreaming, as mentioned above, is now a part of the legal framework in Iceland. To promote this change the Centre for Gender Equality has launched a special project with the aid of EU's PROGRESS-program. The aim of the project is to increase the aspect of gender mainstreaming in the work of the institution, provide new knowledge and increase awareness among policy makers. This project will lead to enhanced awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming, improve knowledge of the method and develop tools for its implementation. This will give women and men equal access to government services and resources as well as insuring permanent change and equality. A strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is the most effective means to support the promotion of gender equality at all governmental levels - in research, legislation, policy development as well as in projects and activities. The aim is to ensure that women as well as men can influence, participate in and benefit from the national projects. There is a continued need to enhance the gender mainstreaming strategy with renewed knowledge, information and training to promote gender equality at the governmental level. This is increasingly important now, in the global financial crisis.

The concept of gender-responsive budgeting is now a part of the Icelandic Government's policy, but a gender perspective has not been effectively included in the budgetary process yet. This is about to change. The Minister of Finance has appointed a committee of experts to outline a policy on gender budgeting. This is done especially as a response to the financial crisis in order to ensure that there will not be a backlash in Iceland's success in gender equality.

In the wake of the global financial crisis that hit Iceland particularly harshly in the autumn of 2008, the government decided to establish a steering group to monitor the impact of the crisis on people, with regard to gender. The group is called the Gender Equality Watch and works along side another group monitoring the welfare system which has been called the Welfare Watch. The Gender Equality Watch published a report in March 2009 analyzing the changes in the economic life affecting the people. The report mentions the increase of unemployment; the different effect unemployment has had on women and men, such as the danger of increased gender based violence, prostitution and trafficking in human beings. The group put forward proposals on how it would be best to proceed in order to guarantee gender equality in the work ahead both regarding the recession and reconstruction.

## **Part Two: The critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action**

### **Women and Poverty**

Iceland is a country with a relatively minor poverty problem seen in an international perspective. The main reason for this is a high level of education, high rate of employment, both for women (78%) and men (87%), and a supporting welfare system. However, poverty still exists and could increase now due to the economic crisis. The groups of concern with regard to poverty, or at risk of becoming poor, have been identified as:

- Unemployed women
- Women with health problems
- Women that receive invalidity pensions
- Women that receive invalidity allowances

This applies both to married and single women who have children to provide for. This is of concern and shows that the benefits available through the welfare system are not always sufficient to cover the minimum cost of living. This is regarded as a problem that needs to be monitored, especially now in the economic crisis. The cost of living has gone up in the last few years due to inflation but the benefits available have stayed the same. To monitor this problem and other areas of concern the government has established a steering group “the Welfare Watch” monitoring the welfare system, as mentioned above.

### **Education and Training of Women**

In Iceland school attendance is compulsory from the age of 6 to 16. Girls and boys have equal access to education at all levels of education. Girls and boys attend high school at almost equal levels since 1975 and in 2007, girls were 54% of graduated students and boys 46%. The proportion of women graduating at university level has increased over the last decades. In 1975 they were 24% of graduates, 50% in 1985 and 67% in 2007.

The concern regarding education and training is the gender segregated choices that boys and girls make. This is not only a problem related to education, as the workforce is, as a consequence, also highly gender segregated. In some fields of education there are signs that gender segregation is declining. An increasing number of girls are studying law (in 2008 they were 50% of the graduated), medicine (51%) and empirical sciences (62%). This is however only in the traditionally male dominated fields. No male graduate as a nurse (which is studied in universities) in 2008, only 17% of teachers graduated 2007 were masculine and 0.03% of nursery school teachers.

Article 23 in the Gender Equality Act No. 10/2008 states that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science shall monitor compliance with gender equality in schools and educational institutions, including sports and leisure activities. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture shall monitor developments in these areas of society as regards gender equality. A gender equality counselor shall be employed within the Ministry of Education,

Science and Culture and shall monitor the application of the provisions of this Article, and give relevant parties advice on gender equality issues, including affirmative actions to promote gender equality.

Recent research in Iceland has shown that more emphasis on gender equality is needed in the Icelandic education system. In 2008 a project started with the main objective of enhancing gender equality education in schools. The project focuses on the pre-, primary and secondary school levels, i.e. from kindergarten to the age of 16. The project has now been going on for 2 years and is now a cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Centre for Gender Equality and four municipalities, with support from the Ministry for Education and Culture. The main objectives of the project are as mentioned above to strengthen gender equality education, to gender mainstream the curriculum and teaching methods, to increase the information exchange on gender equality education, to create a forum for educators who are focusing on gender equality issues and to enhance co-operation between municipalities in gender equality. The project itself is twofold. Firstly, a webpage ([www.jafnrettiiskolum.is](http://www.jafnrettiiskolum.is)) is in development that will serve as a database for gender equality for educators, students, parents and advisers. The webpage will also serve as a forum for educators who are interested in finding tools, methods and experiences related to gender equality. Secondly, selected schools have been developing special projects focusing on gender equality. These trial projects will serve as a way of getting schools to develop methods to mainstream gender equality into their teaching methods and daily practices. These projects have been published on the webpage. While the projects were running data was collected with the aim of analyzing what effect they have.

## **Women and Health**

Mean life expectancy in Iceland is now 83.0 years for women and 79.6 years for men. Icelandic men can now expect to live longer than men in any other country. Mean life expectancy for Icelandic women is not as good, it is the seventh highest in Europe. The crude death rate was 6.2 per 1,000 inhabitants. Over the last decade, infant mortality in Iceland has been very low compared with other countries. In 2008 infant mortality was 2.5 per 1,000 live births.

During the 20th century, the total fertility rate peaked during the early 1960s. The total fertility rate for the years 1960 and 1959 was 4.27 and 4.24, respectively. Between the mid 1960s and the early 1980s there was a steady decline in total fertility rate. The rate has remained stable since then, around 2.0. Fertility in Iceland is now the highest in Europe. The total fertility rate was 2.14 in 2008. One of the main reasons for this increase in fertility is the parental leave. The Icelandic Parliament passed a groundbreaking legislation on maternity/paternity and parental leave in the year 2000, which included one of the most generous paternity leave entitlements developed in the world. The leave was extended from six months to nine, parents who are active in the labor market are paid 80% of their average salaries during the leave and the payments come from a specific fund, financed through an insurance levy. Furthermore, the parents have equal rights as the leave is distributed evenly

between both parents. Fathers are given three months' non-transferable leave, mothers are given three months and the parents then have three months to share as they wish. The new law has been a success, as 90% of fathers use their right to paternity leave. Recent studies indicate that the positive effects of the Icelandic paternity leave include a more equal distribution of domestic responsibilities as well as a more equal standing in the labor market in the first years after the leave.

The first law that permitted abortions in Iceland dates from 1935, being replaced in 1975 with a more liberal law. Now women have the right to have an induced abortion before the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. In the year 2007 the abortion-rate was 13,5 per 1.000 women among women aged 15 – 44.

On 31 December 2008, a total of 218 cases of HIV infection had been reported in Iceland, there of 163 in men and 55 in women. At that time the infected where 0.06% of the population. Of these, 60 patients had been diagnosed with AIDS, 52 men and 8 women. Of the infected 37 had died of the disease, 32 men and 5 women. In the year 2008 there were 10 new reported cases of HIV, 7 men, 3 women. No reported cases of AIDS have been filed since 2006 and no reported death since 2006.

### **Violence against Women**

A Committee on Measures to Combat Violence against Women has been working since 2005 and has now been appointed to 2011. The Committee composed an action plan which was approved by the Government in September 2006. This plan is intended to run until 2011, and the main task of the committee will be to monitor the enforcement of the plan. This was done at the initiative of the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Justice. In drawing up the plan, attention was given to a draft action plan on gender based violence that had been drawn up by a group of non-governmental organizations and sent to some of the government ministers in April 2005. The committee has made a priority of consulting with non-governmental organizations and others concerned with these issues.

The main aim of the action plan is to work against domestic violence and sexual violence which is directed against women and children, and also to improve the care facilities available for those who have suffered such violence or are at risk of doing so. The action plan is divided into two parts. One covers measures against physical violence against children by those closely related to them and sexual violence against children; the other covers violence in close relationships and sexual violence against women. In each part there are four main guiding principles. The first of these is to increase preventive measures aimed at stimulating public discussion on violence against children and gender based violence and to encourage a change of public attitudes. Secondly, the aim is to give support to staff of institutions so as to enable them to identify the signs and consequences of this kind of and to assist the victims. Thirdly, the aim is to ensure suitable assistance for the victims of domestic violence and sexual

violence, and the fourth aim is to strengthen methods designed to provide treatment for the perpetrators in order to break the vicious circle which is often a feature of this violence.

The action plan is wide-ranging, comprising 37 separate measures covering all aspects of the problem that are considered likely to have an effect in reducing violence in the homes of children and sexual violence. Each measure, together with the aims involved, is described in detail. The work related to the action plan is well on the way. For example, the publication of a manual on violence in close relationships for professionals aimed at raising the knowledge and skills of workers who in the course of their jobs could be dealing with the victims of gender based violence. Five manuals were prepared: the first on information in general, the second for social services, the third for midwives, the fourth for the police and the fifth for public health workers. Special treatment has been developed for perpetrators; *Men take responsibility*, therapy for both individuals and men in groups.

In March 2009 the first Government Action Plan against trafficking in human beings was approved. The Action Plan is the result of a Government resolution from December 2007, which initiated the production of the Action Plan following the recommendations of the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Justice. The objective of the Action Plan is to enhance the coordination of actions that are necessary in order to prevent human trafficking in Iceland, and to further study trafficking in human beings. Furthermore, it specifies actions that are aimed at prevention and education regarding this matter and ensures that aid and protection to victims is provided. There is also an emphasis placed on actions that aim at facilitating the prosecution of the perpetrators. At the same time, the intention is to initiate necessary legislative amendments, so that the United Nations 2000 Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol on Human Trafficking, the Council of Europe 2005 Convention on Action against Human Trafficking, and the Council of Europe 2007 Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse may be ratified, and actions taken to implement these conventions. In addition, bills will be introduced with the goal of criminalizing the demand for prostitution and deleting the exemption provision in paragraph 4, Article 4 of Act No. 85/2007 to operate strip clubs.

The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security established in 2009 a specialist and co-ordination team to supervise matters regarding human trafficking in Iceland and ensure that the alleged victims of human trafficking, including children, are provided with assistance, a safe refuge and protection. The members of such a team will include non-governmental associations that provide aid to the victims of violence, the police and representatives from the relevant ministries. The tasks of this team include providing training for professionals and civil servants who are involved in matters relating to trafficking in persons, an educational campaign with the goal of preventing young males from becoming consumers on the sex market, supervision of researches and the registration of cases of human trafficking. Also, a number of actions are aimed at increasing police specialization, so that the police will be better prepared to conduct investigations into trafficking in persons, prostitution and child pornography. Finally, it is expected that a code of conduct will be approved for the Government Offices and ministerial agencies that will, among other things, declare that any

purchase by any Icelandic Government representative of any kind of sexual services will not be tolerated. The Action Plan is in effect until the end of 2012, but it will undergo revision in 2011, following an evaluation of the results.

### **Women and Armed Conflict**

The Icelandic Government has defined women's empowerment in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction as one of the priority areas of its foreign policy. In March 2008 the Minister of Foreign Affairs published Iceland's Platform of Action for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. In relation to this an international conference was held in June 2009, focusing specifically on women's empowerment. The name of the conference was *Women Negotiating Peace* and brought together 11 speakers and 200 participants from all over the world who shared their experience of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace processes and women's empowerment.

As part of the government's development cooperation efforts is the Gender Equality Training Program (GET Program). The GET Program is a cooperation project between the University of Iceland and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with the objective to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in developing countries and post-conflict areas through education and training. Its main target group is professionals working for government and civil society organizations in developing countries and post-conflict areas undergoing reconstruction. The GET Program will also offer short courses and seminars which are open for professionals from both developed and developing countries. The GET Program is run by the University of Iceland and will be managed by the University's new International Research Institute for Gender Equality and Diversity. A three year pilot phase of the GET Program was formally launched in December 2008, and the first fellows are expected to arrive in Iceland in the autumn of 2009.

The Icelandic government has supported the work of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace (IWC), an organization where Israeli and Palestinian women, work together with women from all over the world on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The IWC is mentioned in the policy statement of the government, as one of the priorities of Iceland's foreign Policy.

### **Women and the Economy**

In Iceland there has been a high employment rate both for women and men. Women have been almost as economically active as men since the 1970's. In July 2009 the activity rate of people in the labor force was 81.9%. The activity rate for women was 77.2% and for men 86.4%. At the same time 9.1% of the labor force were unemployed or in search of a job. The unemployment rate was 7.2% for women and 10.6% for men. The average number of working hours for those who worked during the reference week was 39.9 hours. Men worked 43.9



hours and women worked 35.4 hours on average. The average number of working hours of those who worked full-time was 44.5 hours per week, 46.6 hours for men and 41.1 hours for women. The average number of working hours of those who worked part-time was 23.9 hours per week, 23.3 hours for men and 24.2 hours for women. In this context it is important to keep in mind that men are only 28% of those working part-time.

In the year 2007, there were 13,349 companies in Iceland. In 1999 the number of companies was 7,221. The participation of women in management (chairpersons of boards and board members) of these companies has been about 22% all this time. The ratio of women in the position of managing directors increased during this period from 15% to 19%. This can be traced to the founding of new companies. Women were 23% of managing directors of companies founded in 2007. However women board members of companies registered at Iceland Stock Exchange (ICEX) were in 2004 only 2% and in 2008 they were 18%. This increase is not sufficient. This has given rise to the idea of taking up similar amendments as Norway has taken up in the Public Limited Companies Act, establishing a demand for gender balance (40% quota) on the companies' boards.

### **Women in Power and Decision-making**

Since 1915, when women 40 years and older received the right to vote and to stand for elections, women have, in total, been 8% of all members elected to the parliament. Over the past three decades the number of women elected has been rising steadily: after the general election of 1979 women accounted for only 5% of parliamentarians; this number rose to 25% after the 1995 election and to 35% following the election of 1999. A slight reversal in this positive trend took place in the election of 2003, resulting in a figure of 30%. In the 2007 election the situation did not change much with 32%. In the election in 2009 women got 43% of seats in parliament. In September 2009 Iceland has the fifth highest percentage in the world of women in national parliaments.

In 1970 the first woman took a seat in the Icelandic Government. Since 1983 a woman has been a member of the Government. The first year in which more than one minister serving was a woman was 1999. In 2009 women became 50% of the government cabinet, for the first time and Ms. Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir the first female Prime Minister of Iceland.

The proportion of women on public committees, councils and boards has risen steadily in the last decade. In 2004, the percentage of women in national public committees, councils and boards was 32%, ranging from 40% in the Ministry of Health and Social Security and 39% in the Ministry of Social Affairs to 5% in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The figure in 2005 remained the same, but in 2006 the ratio was 34% women and 66% men. In 2007 the percentage of women was up to 36% and in 2008 the figure was up to 37%. In 2008 some changes took place due to changes in the division of responsibility between the ministries. Four ministries reached the goal of a 40:60 ratio, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security with 49% women, the Ministry of Health with 48%, the Ministry of Education,

Culture and Science with 40% and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also with 40%. The participation of women was the lowest in the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture with 21% women. Work is in progress in all the ministries on achieving a more even gender balance in committees, councils and boards. Since the balance varies greatly from one ministry to another, it is important not only to monitor the overall numbers but also when it comes to making appointments to committees, councils and boards; this is seen as the best means of achieving balance in practice. The new Act on Gender Equality from 2008, states that every committee, council and board shall have an equal number of women and men.

The proportion of women as permanent secretaries in the ministries was 17% in 2006 and 33% in 2009. The proportion of women among directors of government bodies was 25% in 2006 and in 2008 they were 29%.

For the 2006 local government elections, the proportions of candidates were 56% men and 44% women. After the elections, women constituted 35.9% of the members of local governments, men 64.1%; this was an increase for women by 4.8%. One of the likely explanations why women have not made a more rapid progress towards gaining equality in local government is that they generally do not occupy the first seats on the lists of candidates. Thus, the total number of candidates may constitute an obstacle to their success in small local government areas, in which local governments generally consist of only 3-5 elected members. In the 2006 local government elections, men were in the first places on the lists in 78% of cases and women in only 22%. Those in second place on the lists were men in 49.4% of cases and women in 50.6% of cases.

The ratio of women in local governments was highest in the metropolitan area, where they constitute 40% of elected representatives; in terms of the 40%-60% goal, it can be said that progress has been made. Following the local government elections of May 2006, 26.6% of local authorities' executive directors were women, compared to 19% after the elections in 2002.

On the basis of data on the division between the sexes in local governments, the Centre for Gender Equality and the Ministry for Social Affairs and Social Security prepared a "Gender Equality Map" in which each local government area is colored according to the proportions of the sexes in its local government. Those with more even balances (40%-60%) are colored green; those with highly lopsided balances (in which either sex constitutes 0-29%) are colored red. Yellow is the color given to those where the proportion of either sex lies between 30 and 39%. This was done to demonstrate the results graphically and evaluate the progress towards equality. This tool was further developed and became a European project sponsored by the Community Framework Strategy on gender equality (2001-2005). The project was called Tea for Two, illustrating equality and was a cooperation project of Iceland, Norway, Finland, Bulgaria and Greece.

## **Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women**

See Part Three of this report.

### **Women and the Media**

The media has been a male dominated field for a long time. The number of female members of the associations of Icelandic journalists has been growing in the last decades. Women were 18% in 1980, 30% in 1995 and 2007 they were 36%. Despite this increase, few women have held the positions of News Editors and Chief Editors of daily newspapers. No woman has been a manager of a TV-station and only few women have been TV News Editors.

A research made by the Ministry for Education and Culture in 2000 showed that women were 30% of those who appeared in the media (interviews, pictures, news etc.). In 2005 the research was repeated and the outcome was the same.

In 2005 and 2006 Iceland steered a European project funded by the Community Framework Strategy on gender equality (2001-2005). The title of the project was *Sports, media and stereotypes – women and men in sports and media (SMS)*. The purpose of the project was to contribute to the knowledge of representation of women and men in the sports media in Europe and to promote change in the stereotypes presented of both genders in this field and in general to increase gender awareness. A study explored similarities and variations in representations of women and men in sports, and a picture of the sports culture in each country was drawn up. The study showed clear distinctions in how men and women in sports are portrayed by the media. An expert advisory group was established assisting the development of multimedia teaching material for sports reporters as well as sports instructors and coaches about the findings of the research.

### **Women and the Environment**

The issue of gender and environment has not been high on the agenda in Iceland but in the last few years the interest has grown. The awareness of how differently women and men affect and are affected by climate change is now part of the debate on environmental issues. The Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality, with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers decided in May 2008 to focus on gender equality and climate changes. Iceland participated in a side-event at CSW in March 2009 where the project was presented and will organize a side event at the COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009, in cooperation with the other Nordic countries. The Icelandic government has in the negotiations on a new climate agreement emphasized the importance of gender considerations, both as regards the effects climate change has on women and the importance of active involvement of women in decision making and implementation of action designed to adapt to and mitigate climate change.

## **The Girl-child**

As mentioned above a bill amending the General Penal Code, No. 19/1940, was adopted by the Althingi in 2006. Amendments were made to Articles 200-202, dealing with sexual offences against children (Article 204). The minimum age of consent for sexual acts was raised from 14 to 15, and the provision for punishment for having sexual intercourse or other sexual relations with a child under the age of consent was expanded so that these offences qualify for the same punishment as rape, i.e. 1-16 years' imprisonment. This emphasizes the gravity of such offences when the victims are children. Rape, sexual intercourse or other sexual relations involving children under the age of 15 now constitute the most serious types of offences within the category of sexual offences, a position that used to be reserved for rape only. Regarding other sexual offences, an amendment was introduced stating that the period over which liability expires is to begin running from the time when the victim reaches the age of 18 and not 14 as used to be the case.

As mentioned in the chapter above on Violence against Women, a Committee on measures to combat violence against women has been working since 2005 and has now been appointed to 2011. The Committee worked on an action plan to work against violence in close relationships and sexual violence which is directed against women and children. It is divided into two parts. One covers measures against violence in the homes and sexual violence against children; the other covers domestic violence and sexual violence against women. See above.

The first part of the plan of action on violence in homes and sexual abuse, which was approved by the government in September 2006, covered measures that the government intended to take in order to prevent violence against children, and also to assist those who have suffered violence and abuse. The fundamental assumption is that it is always the adult who is responsible if a child suffers violent treatment, and that the perpetrator should suffer the consequences, since this type of conduct cannot be tolerated. The projects in the plan of action are based on this, and are therefore primarily concerned with adults.

The action plan also embraces measures aimed at providing individually-tailored treatment for children who have suffered violence in the home or sexual abuse. These include an emphasis on supporting and developing the work of the Children's House (*Barnahús*), publicizing its service and seeking ways to do more to meet the needs of children who have suffered violence or abuse of any type. Last but not least, emphasis is placed on enabling the perpetrators of violence against children to undergo treatment in order to break the pattern of repeated violence. Amongst other things, it is planned to establish a professional team of experts specializing in the treatment of young offenders who have committed acts of mental cruelty, physical violence or sexual abuse against other children.

### **Part Tree: The institutional development**

Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No. 10/2008, defines the promotion of gender equality and details responsibility. The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security is in charge of the application of the Act. The Centre for Gender Equality is a special institution under the control of the Minister that handles the administration. The tasks handled by the Centre for Gender Equality according to the Act include:

- a. monitoring the application of the Act,
- b. supervising educational and informative activities,
- c. advising government authorities, institutions, companies, non-governmental organizations and individuals on gender equality issues,
- d. making suggestions and proposals to the Minister, the Gender Equality Council and other government authorities on measures to achieve gender equality,
- e. making proposals on affirmative actions,
- f. increasing the level of activity in gender equality issues, i.e. by greater involvement of men in gender equality work,
- g. monitoring gender equality developments in society, i.e. by gathering information and initiating research,
- h. providing assistance to gender equality committees, gender equality counselors and gender equality representatives of local authorities, institutions and companies,
- i. working at preventive measures against gender-based violence in collaboration with other government authorities and organizations specifically involved in such preventive measures,
- j. working against gender based wage discrimination and other forms of gender discrimination in the labor market,
- k. mediating cases of dispute referred to the Centre for Gender Equality on the basis of the Act,
- l. changing traditional gender images and working against negative stereotyping regarding the roles of women and men,
- m. carrying out other tasks in accordance with the aims of the Act in accordance with further decisions by the Minister.

Institutions, enterprises and non-governmental organizations are obliged to provide the Centre for Gender Equality with any type of information necessary for its operations. If the parties concerned do not comply with this request by the Centre for Gender Equality within a reasonable time limit, the Centre may decide that they are to pay *per diem* fines until the information and materials have been provided. If the Centre for Gender Equality considers that the information and materials in question further substantiate the suspicion that a violation of the Act has taken place, it shall request the Gender Equality Complaints Committee to examine the matter, and consequently inform the institution, enterprise or non-governmental organization concerned in writing of its decision to do so.

### *The Gender Equality Complaints Committee*

The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security appoints three members of the Gender Equality Complaints Committee for periods of three years at a time in accordance with nominations by the Supreme Court. They shall all be qualified lawyers, and at least one of them shall have expert knowledge of gender equality issues. The chairman and vice-chairman shall meet the conditions set for serving as a district court judge. The task of the Gender Equality Complaints Committee is to examine cases and to deliver a ruling in writing on whether provisions of the Act have been violated. The rulings of the Complaints Committee are binding for the parties to each case. The parties may refer the Committee's rulings to the courts.

Individuals, enterprises, institutions and non-governmental organizations, either in their own name or on behalf of their members who consider that they are the victims of violations of the Act, may submit their case to the Gender Equality Complaints Committee. The Centre for Gender Equality may request that the Gender Equality Complaints Committee examine a case.

Cases shall be submitted to the Complaints Committee in writing within six months of the date when the alleged violation of the Act was known, or from the time when a situation regarded as an infringement of the Act came to an end, or from the time when the person concerned became aware of the alleged violation. If reasoning is sought on the basis of the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act, the period for submission shall be reckoned from the time that the reasoning has been obtained. In special circumstances, the Complaints Committee may decide to examine a case even though the time limit defined above has passed, though in no case exceeding one year.

The Complaints Committee may, after consulting the plaintiff, send the case to the Centre for Gender Equality for mediation.

### *The Gender Equality Council*

After each parliamentary election, the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security shall appoint a Gender Equality Council of eleven representatives. The Minister shall appoint the chairman without nomination; two representatives nominated jointly by the employees' associations; two representatives nominated jointly by the employers' associations; two nominated jointly by the Icelandic Feminist Association, the Federation of Icelandic Women's Associations and the Icelandic Women's Rights Society; one nominated jointly by the Women's Shelter Organization, (*Samtök um kvennaathvarf*) and the Counseling and Information Centre for Survivors of Sexual Violence (*Stígamót*); one nominated by the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Iceland (RIKK); one nominated by the Association for Parental Equality and one nominated by the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland. Alternates shall be appointed accordingly.

The Gender Equality Council shall work in close contact with the Centre for Gender Equality and advise the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security and the Director of the Centre for Gender Equality on professional policy-making in gender equality issues. Particular emphasis shall be placed on promoting gender equality in the labor market and on the reconciliation of work and family life.

The Gender Equality Council prepares the Gender Equality Forum in consultation with the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security and present a report on its work to the forum.

#### *The Gender Equality Forum*

The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security shall call a Gender Equality Forum within a year of parliamentary elections, and again two years thereafter. The Gender Equality Forum discusses gender equality issues; at its beginning the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security shall present a report on the situation and developments in gender equality issues. The Minister's report shall include, i.e., an assessment of the status and success of the projects covered by the current gender equality action program adopted as a parliamentary resolution and a review of the situation and developments regarding gender equality issues in principal spheres of society. The Gender Equality Council shall provide a summary of the discussions at the forum, and deliver the summary to the Minister. Other tasks of the forum shall, at each occasion, be decided by the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security after receiving proposals from the Gender Equality Council.

The forum shall be open to all; the Gender Equality Council shall invite members of the Althingi (the Parliament of Iceland), representatives of national and local government institutions, including their gender equality representatives, and representatives of the social partners and non-governmental organizations with gender equality issues on their agenda.

#### *Parliamentary resolution on a gender equality action program*

Within one year following a general election, the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security shall present to the Althingi a motion for a parliamentary resolution on a four-year gender equality action program after having received proposals made by the ministries, the Centre for Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Council. Discussions at the Gender Equality Forum shall also be taken into account. The gender equality action program shall include projects intended to secure equal status and equal rights of women and men in Icelandic society. The actions planned, and the estimated funding for projects, shall be itemized in the program. The report presented by the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security on the situation and developments of gender equality issues to the Gender Equality Forum shall accompany the proposed parliamentary resolution.

#### *The local authorities' gender equality committees*

Following local government elections, the municipalities shall appoint gender equality committees to examine equal status and equal rights of women and men within their

municipality. These committees advise the local governments on matters with a bearing on gender equality, and monitor and take initiative on measures, including affirmative action, to ensure the equal status and equal rights of women and men within their municipality.

Each gender equality committee shall supervise the compilation of a four-year gender equality program stating, i.e. how work on gender mainstreaming in all spheres is to proceed, together with an action plan on how to redress imbalance in the positions of women and men within the municipality. Gender equality programs shall be submitted for approval by the relevant local government not later than one year after local government elections.

#### *Gender equality representatives*

Each ministry shall have a gender equality representative with an expert knowledge of gender equality issues. The gender equality representative shall deal with, and monitor, gender equality work in the policy areas of the ministry in question and its institutions, i.e. the expert shall work on gender mainstreaming in the fields administered by the ministry. Each year, the gender equality representatives shall send a report on the status and developments in gender equality issues in the policy areas of their respective ministries to the Centre of Gender Equality.

#### *Gender equality counselors*

The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security may engage a gender equality counselor to work temporarily on gender equality issues in a specific field and/or in a particular region of the country.

#### *Participation in government and municipal committees, councils and boards*

When appointments are made to national and local government committees, councils and boards, care shall be taken to ensure as equal representation of men and women as possible, and not lower than 40% of either sex when there are more than three representatives in a body. This shall also apply to the boards of publicly-owned limited companies and enterprises in which the state or a municipality is the majority owner.

When nominations are made to national and local government committees, councils and boards, a man and a woman shall be nominated. The nominating party may deviate from the condition of the first sentence when, in consequence of objective circumstances, it is not possible to nominate both a man and a woman. In such cases, the nominating party shall explain the reasons for this.



#### **Part Four: The remaining key challenges and constraints as well as plans for future action and initiatives**

The overarching area of concern with regard to identifying key challenges in the further advancement of women and the full implementation of the Platform for Action are related to the ongoing economic recession in Iceland. The immediate task of the government is to cut expenditure in the state budget, raise taxes and stimulate economic growth in existing or new areas of economic activity. Budget cuts will, according to the economic program of the Icelandic government, need to be carried out annually at the minimum for the next three years. The scope of these actions is unparalleled in Icelandic history. A high political priority is placed on a strict monitoring of the impact of the economic crisis on the genders, gender impact assessments on any action taken by the government in response to the crisis and gender-just execution of any initiated actions, measures or programs.

The quality of the health system, its affordability and accessibility by all, has for a long time been identified as a corner stone in gender equality in Iceland, not only due to the fact that health concerns of women are properly addressed and prioritized, but also because free, high-quality health service for all lifts a substantial burden of women of providing care within the home and the family. Also, the health system is an important employment sector for women. While temporary lay-offs in the public health service cannot be excluded, care is given to maintain its high quality, especially in areas of major concern to women, children and disadvantaged groups.

The ongoing economic recession is likewise influencing the issue of violence against women. One of the tools the government has implemented to monitor the impact of the recession is, as explained above, on one hand The Welfare Watch, where a series of actors from both the public sector and NGOs cooperate to monitor various statistical indicators and areas of concern, and the Gender Equality Watch with a similar mandate as the other. Violence against women and children has been identified as an issue of concern. Judging from the impact of economic recessions in neighboring countries in recent times, a.o. Finland in the nineties, reports on domestic violence and child neglect rose significantly. The Icelandic National Commissioner of the State Police has warned that the same tendencies might be revealed in the Icelandic society, and it seems already to be a fact with reports on child neglect.

The work on the implementation of the Action Plan on Measures to Combat Violence against Women (2006-2011) has been strengthened, its most recent actions include, as detailed above, the publication of handbooks for various professional groups on identifying and assisting possible victims and providing those groups with educational seminars on the issue. A legal amendment is now under debate, referred to as the Austrian method – of providing police with the option of removing the violator in cases of domestic violence from the home.

The recently adopted Governmental Action Plan against Trafficking in Human beings, from March 17<sup>th</sup> 2009, is currently in its initial stages of implementation. A key action, the establishment of a Specialist and Coordination Team, is now concluded. The role of the team has been described earlier in this report. Legal amendments provided for in the Action Plan

that have already been introduced to the Parliament include an amendment of the Penal Code so as to bring its definition of THB into harmony with the Palermo Protocol, an amendment to the Act on foreigners to introduce a special category of residence permit to victims of THB and a reflection period of six months, and finally an amendment to the Act on Restaurants, Accommodation Establishments and Entertainment no. 85/2007 in order to delete an exemption provision under which strip-clubs have been allowed to operate. Already in March this year an amendment to the Penal Code was passed by the Parliament, in accordance with the Action Plan, that criminalizes the purchase of prostitution. These two last actions aim at curbing the demand for prostitution. Finally, the Ministry of Health has now decided to change a regulation on the provision of health services to those who are not health insured by Icelandic law, namely citizens from outside the European Economic Area who are victims of THB.

The adoption and further implementation of the Governmental Action Plan against THB bear witness to a strong commitment of the Icelandic authorities to combat THB with all means necessary, pursuant to the acknowledgement by the society at large that THB has, in a relatively short span of time, become a part of organized crime in Iceland.

In the policy statement of the government formed in May this year, the issue of women's status in the economy is given a high priority, especially in the light of the ongoing economic recession. Unemployment, in recent years almost undetectable, amounted in September 2009 to 7.6% among males and 6.7% among females. While unemployment was significantly higher among men than women at the onset of the recession, the gap has narrowed. Since cuts in public expenditures are planned for the next three fiscal years, an area of great concern is the long term effect on female employment, women being predominantly employed in the public sector. The official policy of the government towards state agencies and institutions that need to down-size is that lay-offs should be the last resort. While cuts in wages are on their agenda, these cuts mainly affect those with higher wages and plus payments, predominantly men, resulting in a slight narrowing of the gender pay gap among public employees. The Ministry of Finance monitors these developments closely.

The government policy statement reveals alertness to the need of gender mainstreaming in any program or initiative designed to stimulate the labor market, acknowledging the fact that traditional stimulus remedies tend to favor male rather than female employment.

Women and Decision-Making will continue to be an area of major concern for the Icelandic government. This month, the Ministry of Transport and Local Municipalities, issued a report on women in local governments that contained various proposals to enhance the opportunities of women with regard to up-coming local elections in May 2010. According to these proposals, partnerships will be made with women political leaders, NGOs and political parties to initiate concrete actions to this end.

As mentioned before, the policy statement of the government of Iceland from May this year, puts gender equality and the advancement of women at the forefront of its priorities. To summarize some of its main points:

*Women's influence in the country's recovery will be ensured. The government will therefore make every effort to promote gender equality at all levels of society, instituting specific measures to this end if necessary. Furthermore, gender perspectives will guide job creation efforts, in order that they can benefit both men and women from varied backgrounds. The government will take action to eliminate gender-linked wage inequalities in co-operation with interest groups and the social partners. The preparation of equal rights standards will be completed during the electoral term and the work of ministerial equal rights officers expanded. Proposals from the Gender Equality Watch will be acted upon. The government will take action to eliminate gender-based violence, for instance, by enshrining the Austrian method of violence prevention in legislation, so that perpetrators of violence are removed from their homes, and striptease prohibited. The action program to combat trafficking in human beings, gender-linked violence and domestic violence will be implemented. Special attention will be devoted to preventive measures and a response plan for rising domestic violence in parallel to the economic downturn. In determining the framework for expenditure for the next four years, decisions will be based on this prioritization and emphasis placed on consensus on urgent welfare tasks, job protection, gender equality and regional impact. Gendered economic management will be a key concern in budget preparation and economic policy.*

In order to coordinate the efforts of the government to these ends, two structural decisions have already been implemented. The former is the transferal of the overall responsibility of policy making and leadership in the area of gender equality to the Prime Ministers Office, and the latter is the establishment of a ministerial committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security and the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, enacted in October 2009. The overall responsibility of this committee is to ensure that all major decisions, legislative bills, programs and measures, in particular those pertaining to the ongoing economic recession, be gender-mainstreamed and subject to gender impact assessments. The appointment of the Minister of Justice and Human Rights to this committee is a consequence of the government's commitment to integrate the struggle against THB and gender-based violence into this highest level of political priority in the area of gender equality. One of the key actions that will be taken by this committee in the months to come is to present to the Parliament a new four-year governmental action plan on gender equality, which will contain concrete actions by all governmental ministries to this end.