

June 2019



# Iceland's Implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

*Voluntary National Review*





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Sustainable Development Voluntary National Review

Reykjavík, June 2019

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## Message from the Prime Minister

Every Friday at noon, hundreds of young people gather outside Althingi, Iceland's Parliament, insisting on radical action against climate change. They are a part of an international movement of young people who rightly point out the fact that today's decisions determine their future. Climate change is a crisis for humanity as a whole; rendering traditional territorial borders meaningless. International collaboration is the only way forward.

The Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000, were often referred to as "the world's biggest promise". They were a global agreement to reduce poverty and human deprivation. And they did. The MDGs lifted more than one billion people out of extreme poverty. The goals provided access to water and sanitation; drove down child mortality; drastically improved maternal health; cut the number of children out of school; and made huge advances in combatting HIV/AIDS and malaria.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a bold commitment to finish what has been started. Coinciding with the historic Paris Agreement on climate change, the SDGs are the promise our young people are calling for, of sustainability, equality and wellbeing for all. The SDGs are also an important reminder that sustainable development is not just an issue for faraway places. Each and every one of us has both rights and obligations in this context. While some of the SDGs might feel distant from our daily lives, they encompass everything that makes life worthwhile, such as education, water, peace and equality, to name just a few. The SDGs also call for new solutions, through research and innovation, in order to secure more sustainable lifestyles and inclusive communities.

Iceland's commitment to the SDGs is demonstrated in this first Voluntary National Review. An inter-ministerial working group has mapped Iceland's position for all 169 targets and specified 65 priority targets. These include a focus on human economic and social well-being for all, protection of the rights of children and marginalised groups, conservation of the natural environment and combating climate change. The SDGs are also at the heart of Iceland's development co-operation. An Icelandic Youth Council for the SDGs was established to ensure the formal participation of young people in the promotion and realisation of the goals. Our success is dependent upon our ability to involve municipalities, businesses, civil society and individuals. I am grateful for the enthusiastic response from all these sectors in Iceland.

My government is deeply committed to the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development and to creating a more equal, prosperous and inclusive world. This is the promise we intend to fulfil.



**Katrín Jakobsdóttir**  
Prime Minister of Iceland

# Summary

Iceland is fully committed to the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development both nationally and internationally. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been integrated into government policy on social, economic and environmental affairs, with a particular emphasis on building a peaceful and just society, free from fear and violence.

Domestically, the Government aims to identify and better serve marginalised groups in society and to build partnerships to address the large environmental footprint of modern lifestyle. Iceland is still a net contributor to climate change, but heads for carbon-neutrality at the latest in 2040.

Internationally, Iceland shares its expertise in gender equality, land restoration and the use of sustainable natural marine and energy resources through its international co-operation, contributing to global progress on SDGs 5, 7, 13, 14 and 15. The promotion of human rights for all, including LGBTI persons, is a cornerstone in Iceland's foreign policy and its international development co-operation – in line with Agenda 2030 and the Government's domestic priorities. In particular, Iceland has been a vocal champion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a key driver for the achievement of the SDGs.

## Process

An inter-ministerial working group leads the work of the Icelandic government towards implementing the SDGs. It has mapped Iceland's position for all 169 targets and specified 65 priority targets that will guide the authorities in implementing the goals in the coming years. Data has been gathered for 70 of the indicators for the SDGs, which are based on a defined methodology, but more work remains to strengthen the statistical foundation of the SDGs in Iceland.

The SDGs serve as guiding principles in Iceland's development co-operation, as the government's main goal in development work is to reduce poverty and hunger and to promote general welfare based on gender equality, human rights and sustainable development. New initiatives aim to build public-private partnerships in international development co-operation, as the SDGs will not be met unless the private sector is a part of the solution.

Strong emphasis has been placed on integrating the SDGs into the government's five-year fiscal strategy. Linking SDG targets directly to specific government policy



objectives offers an opportunity to map the means of implementation of specific targets, estimate funding allocation for the SDGs at any given time and anticipate potential synergies and trade-offs. Additionally, efforts are being made to actively involve local authorities in their important role in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

## **Inclusion**

The government acknowledges that implementing the SDGs will require a concerted effort by many different stakeholders. Therefore, the government has focused on consultation and co-operation on the implementation of the goals, both internationally as well as nationally. The Icelandic Youth Council for the SDGs gives young people a platform to express their voice to policy makers. Children have the right to have their views heard and child participation is crucial for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Iceland's VNR report was made available in the government's electronic consultation portal to invite the opinions of various parties. This feedback was taken into account in writing the final report. Further and more effective consultations with various stakeholders is planned on a regular basis.

## **Challenges**

Iceland is a Nordic welfare state with a relatively high standard of living. For ten consecutive years, Iceland has been ranked both the world's most peaceful country and the one with the greatest gender equality.

Despite real success in many areas, Iceland still faces a variety of challenges and has a way to go before achieving some of the SDG targets. The VNR report attempts to give a clear picture of Iceland's main challenges for each of the 17 goals, with the aim of identifying marginalised groups, such as immigrants and persons with disabilities, in order to leave no groups or individuals behind. Climate change is one of the major challenges in Iceland as well as responsible consumption and production.

The VNR sets out the next phase of Iceland's implementation of the SDGs, including the ambitious government's Climate Action Plan, which is an example of a co-ordinated policy laid out by seven ministers in consultation with various stakeholders.

# Introduction

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as an important guide for the Icelandic government in working towards increased sustainability and thus a better world. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 marked a turning point, as the world's states have never before set themselves such broad, common goals. Iceland took an active part in the negotiations on the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasising renewable energy, halting land degradation, sustainable use of marine resources, gender equality and advancement in the treatment of neurological disorders, including spinal cord injuries. Iceland also emphasised ensuring that the SDGs be forward-looking and include the most marginalised people, as well as showing respect for the human rights of all - including the rights of LGBT persons.

The hallmark of the 17 SDGs is that they are universal, and that all nations should work systematically towards them, both domestically and internationally, to 2030. The Icelandic government's working group for the SDGs has mapped Iceland's position for all 169 targets and has specified priority targets that will guide the authorities in implementing the goals in the coming years. The SDGs also serve as guiding principles in Iceland's international development co-operation, as the main goal of the Icelandic government in development work is to reduce poverty and hunger and to promote general welfare based on gender equality, human rights and sustainable development.

The SDGs also underline the need to promote human rights to achieve sustainable development. In addition to social, economic and environmental goals, the SDGs promise a more peaceful and more just society, free from fear and violence. Furthermore, all states are to work towards equality and non-discrimination, including gender equality, as the SDGs affirm, among other things, the responsibility of all states to respect, protect and promote human rights without discrimination based on race, colour, gender, language, religion, political and other views, ethnic and social origins, wealth, disability or other status. Human rights are the cornerstone of Icelandic foreign policy, which is reflected in part in Iceland's priorities during its membership of the UN Human Rights Council.

Implementing the SDGs is not only in the hands of the government; instead it will require a concerted effort by many different stakeholders for them to be realised. In the light of this, the Icelandic government has focused on consultation and co-operation on the implementation of the goals.

Iceland is a Nordic welfare state and Icelanders' standard of living is generally considered good. For ten consecutive years, Iceland has been ranked both the

world's most peaceful country and the one with the greatest gender equality. The two go hand in hand, as gender equality is both a prerequisite and a driving force for sustainable development and peace.

But despite real success in many areas Iceland still faces a variety of challenges and has a long way to go to reach some of the SDG targets. The following sections attempt to give a clear picture of Iceland's main challenges, with the aim of identifying marginalised groups and mapping out the next steps in implementation in order to leave no groups or individuals behind.

This report places special emphasis on children - the generation which will take over after the period defined for the SDGs has concluded. On occasion of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is appropriate to honour the Convention's provision that children have the right to express their opinions, and to influence issues that concern them. In many parts of the world, including in Iceland, children and youth have recently protested government inaction on climate issues. This solidarity is a strong indication of children's concern for the situation created by past generations, and those in power have a duty to listen to what they have to say.



# Methodology and process for preparation of the review

The government's first step towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Iceland was to establish a working group for the SDGs. The working group's national status report was published in June 2018 and provides insight into Iceland's position vis-à-vis the targets in both the domestic and international arena. This first Voluntary National Review (VNR) report on Iceland is based to a considerable extent on that work.

The status report involved mapping the main tasks, plans and challenges of the government in relation to specific targets, and obtaining data for the relevant indicators. The working group defined 65 priority targets, using a methodology proposed by the University of Iceland.

The status report marked an important milestone in the implementation of the SDGs in Iceland. The report provides a clear baseline and has been highly useful in the co-ordination of efforts towards reaching the goals, both domestically and internationally. The SDGs are a large and extensive project, but by joining forces a common vision for development towards a sustainable society can be realised.

## Working Group for the Sustainable Development Goals

In March 2017, the government decided to appoint a working group of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and Statistics Iceland, which would manage the analysis, implementation and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to ensure the involvement of all the ministries in the work, a contact group was also formed, comprised of representatives of other ministries, as well as an observer from the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland.

In the autumn of 2018, the working group was reorganised and now consists of representatives from all ministries, the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland and Statistics Iceland, as well as observers from the Youth Council for the SDGs and the UN Association in Iceland. The representative of the Prime Minister's Office is chairman of the group and the Foreign Ministry's representative vice-chairman.

According to the government's decision, the principal task of the working group initially was to analyse the status of the targets for the SDGs, draft a status report with proposals on prioritisation of targets for the government, and set forth proposals for future arrangements and procedures in connection with the implementation of the goals in Iceland. In particular, the SDG working group was to look at how to integrate the implementation of the SDGs with government policy

and planning and how to work on implementation of the goals in cooperation with domestic stakeholders.

Following the submission of the status report in the summer of 2018 and the adoption of the priority targets, the working group has worked systematically on implementing the SDGs, with emphasis on the priority targets. The working group also handles international cooperation on the goals and has overseen the preparation of this first VNR to the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

### **Prioritisation of targets**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals consist of 17 objectives and 169 targets, as well as 232 indicators. Most of the 169 targets are applicable to Iceland, but to varying degrees. It soon became clear that in order to achieve measurable results in the implementation of the targets in Iceland, they had to be prioritised in order to improve efficiency and oversight in policy formulation and planning. It should be mentioned, however, that the priority targets do not exclude work on implementing other targets. The aim is to implement all the targets that apply to Iceland, and a good number of them have already been implemented. In those cases, emphasis will be placed on doing even better and, at the same time, sharing Iceland's experience and expertise with other nations of the world.

The first steps taken to prioritise the targets were to evaluate what data existed in Iceland on each indicator and its quality. It was important that the data be internationally comparable and that the related indicators be clearly defined. In July 2017, the Institute for Sustainability Studies (ISS) at the University of Iceland was entrusted with evaluating the data collection that had already taken place. The objective of this project was to prepare two reports, firstly, an assessment of the quality of the data collected by the SDG working group and, secondly, to make proposals on behalf of the Institute on methodology for prioritising the SDGs in Iceland. Work then proceeded based on the proposals presented in the second report, following a so-called "Criteria-Based Framework". The goals were evaluated using four criteria: conformity with the government coalition platform, connection to Icelandic reality, access to data and distance to target, using a specific scale; however, the weighting of the criteria differed in the calculations. Following consultations with government experts, 65 targets were given priority in the government's work in implementing the SDGs in Iceland and in international cooperation for the next few years.

## SDG statistics

In many ways, the SDGs are a long-distance race towards very ambitious objectives. A total of 232 indicators have been linked to the 169 targets. Based on these indicators, the UN has sought to construct a detailed dashboard for the SDGs, so that the nations of the world will always have as clear a picture as possible of their situation vis-à-vis the targets. Work on specifying indicators is still progressing at full pace and a UN IAEG-SDGs expert committee is involved in the extensive and complex task of finalizing the list of internationally appropriate indicators for the targets.

The indicators developed by the UN need to be adapted to the Icelandic context using available data. Accompanying the Icelandic status report published in June 2018 was a statistical appendix, showing Iceland's first version of this dashboard, which has now been updated in accordance with the latest measurements. The data shows Iceland's position for 70 of the indicators based on a defined methodology. The dashboard has also been made easily accessible on Iceland's website for the SDGs.

From the outset, Statistics Iceland has had a representative in the SDG working group to provide advice and support, not least in the basic work required to lay the cornerstone for the SDG statistics. Statistics Iceland now manages the structure of the SDG statistics in Iceland.

The working group turned to various institutions to find reliable data sources and examine where data might be lacking. The working group concluded an agreement with ISS of the University of Iceland on quality evaluation of the data available, to ensure that the data is internationally comparable and that all indicators are clearly defined. The analysis was carried out by a broad network of Icelandic scholars, based on the work of the leading experts in each subject area. The outcome of this work was a detailed report on evaluation of the data and databases related to the SDGs, which proved to be a solid basis for further statistical work.

The global platform of the SDGs can be quite complex and even misleading, as more than one version of indicators and targets exists. This makes it important to realise that, while the UN indicators apply to the entire world, countries or regions can also adopt their own indicators to better reflect their progress towards reaching the targets. For instance, the European Union (EU) has statistical indicators that address their issues and the Nordic countries are considering defining Nordic statistical indicators in areas where the UN indicators have not been adequately defined, such as on SDG 12.

## Collaboration on Voluntary National Review

The government's SDG working group has cooperated and consulted with various parties on the analysis, implementation and presentation of Iceland's position relative to the goals. In addition to the afore-mentioned consultation with the University of Iceland, both bilateral and open meetings have been organised, as well as conferences on the SDGs with participation from the private sector and civil society. This VNR report was also made available in the government's electronic consultation portal ([www.samradsgatt.is](http://www.samradsgatt.is)) to encourage public debate and invite the





opinions of various parties. These opinions were taken into account in writing the final report. The SDG working group received nine submissions through the portal from the following individuals and groups: Association of Chartered Engineers in Iceland, Auður Guðjónsdóttir, Iceland National Olympians Association, IOGT Iceland, Landsvirkjun – National Power Company of Iceland, Save the Children Iceland, The Icelandic Youth Council, Throskahjálp – National association of intellectual disabilities, and Valorka.

# Government means of implementation

The SDGs are being implemented across all ministries, with special emphasis on the 65 priority targets. Guidelines have also been issued on how to connect all the targets of the government's fiscal strategy with the SDGs, where appropriate. Local authorities are increasingly linking their policies and plans to the SDGs.

## Incorporation in national frameworks

Various new government policies and programmes have been linked to the SDGs, including a new development cooperation policy, a draft of a new education policy and innovation policy, as well as Iceland's climate action plan. Iceland holds the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019 and has linked three areas of emphasis in its Presidency program to the SDGs, as well as emphasising the SDG 12, which is the focus of Nordic cooperation on sustainable development until 2020.

## Policy coherence and trade-offs

The broad scope and the integrated nature of the SDGs call for effective co-ordination between policies and programs for their implementation. This means both horizontal co-ordination, between different functions of ministries and other policymakers, as well as vertical co-ordination internationally. In implementing the goals, it is therefore important to ensure that policy-making is co-ordinated within the administration, and the same applied to the follow-up on progress towards the goals. Closely connecting different goals opens up the possibility that the progress towards one goal can also smooth the path for another. Comprehensive implementation requires a balance between economic, social and environmental considerations in all policies, across ministries and levels of government, and in collaboration with other stakeholders. The government therefore needs to ensure that all stakeholders are consulted and that a coherent policy is in place for the implementation of each target. Mention should also be made of the importance of considering, in formulating policy, the potential effects that actions in Iceland can have on other states, particularly developing countries.

Analysing the ministries' responsibility for SDG targets and the choice of priority targets reveals which ministries work together on specific issues. In implementing each goal, other partners should then be considered. The government's Climate Action Plan (implementation of target 13.2) is an example of a co-ordinated policy. Seven government ministers presented the first version of the action plan, together with joint work on implementing it, in September 2018. In addition, representatives of businesses, civil society, local authorities and others were consulted on determining



specific actions. This was the first version of the action plan; a second version is expected to be released in 2019.

### **Sustainable Development Goals and the fiscal strategy**

In the past three years, strong emphasis has been placed on linking the SDGs to the targets set for various policy areas in drafting the government's five-year fiscal strategy. This fiscal strategy is based on the state's financial policy and the basic values and conditions defined in the Act on Public Finances. It includes a detailed elaboration of the targets set out in the strategy, further expands the objectives of financial policy and analyses how they are to be achieved from one year to the next. The purpose of the fiscal strategy is to elaborate on the targets for government revenues and expenditures and their development, as it shows the contributions (budget appropriations) for state activities in 35 areas of operation for the next five years. Each area covers specific tasks, such as the activities of the courts or universities, and the fiscal strategy outlines a basis for clear prioritisation of expenditures and effective preparation of measures to achieve the objectives of financial policy and the fiscal strategy.

Linking SDG targets to the objectives of the state's areas of operation offers an opportunity to map how work is being directed at implementing specific targets and, similarly, to estimate how much funding is allocated to the implementation of the goals at any given time. Doing so also provides the opportunity to map more precisely the connections between the goals in Iceland and thus anticipate the compromises which may be needed in policy formulation for the goals. Cost-benefit analysis of specific actions with respect to other objectives can be useful in drafting policy to maximise synergies and possible benefits accruing from certain funding. The same goes for possible opportunity cost.

The links between the SDGs and the fiscal strategy will be further strengthened and the methodology further refined. A software solution is being implemented for the drafting of the fiscal strategy and its linkage to the SDGs. Such a database will provide an overview of the SDGs for policy experts and thereby increase the co-ordination of strategies and programmes in different areas of operation.

### **Local government**

Implementation of the SDGs by the Icelandic authorities is the task of both administrative levels, the state, on the one hand, and local authorities, on the other. The Association of Local Authorities has a representative in the government's SDG working group. With the involvement of the Association, the introduction of SDGs

is approached as a joint project of the state and municipalities, as they have an important role for successful implementation of the SDGs. It has been estimated that some 65% of the SDG targets cannot be implemented without the involvement of local authorities.<sup>1</sup>

SDG indicators measure the overall performance of each member state at national level, but since the suitability of global targets for local implementation varies, it is up to local authorities to adapt them locally and ensure that their implementation is tailored to local circumstances. Simplifying slightly, it could be said that the localisation is based, firstly, on how local governments can support the central government in achieving the SDGs and, secondly, on how global targets can provide a framework for local government policy. However, this does not necessarily imply that the local authority adopts a new policy, but rather that the existing policy serve as the basis. In addition, performance indicators are important so that the local authority can monitor locally the progress of implementation and results at any given time.

### **Leaving no one behind**

In implementing the SDGs, special care needs to be taken to leave no individual or group behind, such as marginalised groups like persons with disabilities, immigrants and low-income people. Specific actions have been taken in recent years to identify and address the needs of individuals and groups in difficulties financially and socially, and the activities of the Welfare Watch, which is discussed later in this report, are an example of such efforts. However, in all mapping and policy-making for the SDGs, a specific focus needs to be directed at individuals and groups which are or may be at risk of being marginalised. In this report, efforts to ensure that no one is left behind are labelled with a specific stamp on the page margins throughout the report.

### **Awareness-raising**

Particular emphasis is placed on disseminating information on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, as it is clear that they will not be achieved without the widespread participation of the general public, academia, civil society and the private sector. To this end, in 2018, a special communications officer for the SDGs was appointed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, to develop and produce information material to raise awareness and understanding of the goals and to pay specific attention to their integration with the activities of Government Offices.

In March 2018, a promotional campaign was launched on all the country's main media about the SDGs under the title "Let's Have Good News to Tell in 2030". As the goals aim at progress in all major areas of society on a global scale, the campaign attempted to identify what some of the good news might be in the future, if the goals are met. The objective was to draw attention to the SDGs in order to promote public

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<sup>1</sup>Cities Alliance, 2015, Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a Successful New Urban Agenda.



Elíza Gígja Ómarsdóttir, 15 year old Icelandic girl, travelled to Uganda and learned about the SDGs through the eyes of her peers there.

participation in their implementation. Short videos were shown on television, social media (Facebook and YouTube) and in cinemas, and online advertising banners and full-page advertisements were published in Icelandic media.

In December 2018 another promotional campaign began, with the spotlight this time directed at Iceland's international development cooperation, financed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It consisted of a videoblog-style documentary series, featuring a teenage girl, Elíza Gígja Ómarsdóttir, who travelled to Uganda to meet her peers there. The series showed the differences and similarities between the daily life of young people in the two countries, highlighting how some of the SDGs come into play. The series was shown on Icelandic National Broadcasting (RÚV) in December 2018.

The government's SDG working group has three times commissioned a Gallup poll measuring public awareness of the SDGs. The first survey, conducted in January 2018 before the first promotional campaign began, showed that 46.6% of the population knew about the goals or had heard of them. Public awareness was measured again in May 2018, following the promotional campaign, showing an awareness rate of 57.4%. The proportion of persons who said they knew the SDGs increased by 1.5 percentage points between surveys, while those who had heard about the targets increased by 9.3 percentage points. A total of 27% of the participants had noticed the first campaign. The results therefore indicate that the campaign has had some success in increasing public awareness. The public's awareness was measured for the third time in February 2019, and in this instance 65.6% of respondents said they knew or had heard about the goals. Therefore, it can now be stated that about two of every three Icelanders have heard of the SDGs.

# Stakeholder engagement

Among the main objectives of the SDGs is to have different parties cooperate in implementing the goals. In fact, their implementation cannot be achieved except through cooperation between national and local authorities, the private sector, civil society, academia, youth and individuals around the world. The Icelandic government is committed to stakeholder engagement to ensure the successful implementation of the goals. The following are the main collaborative projects already undertaken with the involvement of the government state.

## Cooperation of Local Authorities

The Association of Local Authorities has the role of integrator and co-ordinator at a local government level. In formulating its strategy for 2018-2022, the Association of Local Authorities emphasises awareness raising of the SDGs among municipalities, as well as active dissemination of information and advice on implementation.<sup>2</sup> These main threads in its strategy were drafted in part in consultation with the government's working group.

In February 2019, the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland organised a seminar on the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Prior to this, the Prime Minister had written to all 72 municipalities in the country, encouraging them to study the goals and attend the meeting. Keynote speakers were sought from those municipalities that had already started work on the SDGs. Nordregio, the Nordic regional policy institute, also presented a survey of Nordic municipalities and the SDGs in September 2018.<sup>3</sup>

The Association has decided to examine whether municipalities are interested in setting up a cooperation and consultation forum for municipalities, that would have the role of defining a common policy or vision of the local authorities concerning the SDGs and their implementation. The forum would potentially be launched in the autumn of 2019. Although according to most indications, interest in the SDGs is high, the municipalities generally differ in how far work has proceeded. It was evident at the first briefing that the municipalities are still searching for practical routes and goals to set. Similar positions are also clearly visible among municipalities in other Nordic countries, e.g. in the Nordregio survey mentioned above.

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<sup>2</sup> Association of Local Authorities in Iceland, December 2018, Framtíðin er hér: Stefnumörkun Sambands íslenskra sveitarfélaga 2018-2022 (The Future is Here: Strategy for the Association of Local Authorities 2018-2022).

<sup>3</sup> Nordregio, September 2018: Global goals for local priorities: The 2030 Agenda at local level.



PHOTO BY VIKTOR ÖRN GUBMUNDSSON

The National Union for Icelandic Students (LÍS), the largest organisation for students in higher education in Iceland, discussing the SDGs during their national convention earlier this year.

### **Private sector**

The SDGs are closely linked to corporate social responsibility and corporate sustainability criteria. They are also related to criteria for investors making responsible and sustainable investment decisions. Several companies in Iceland have begun linking their work to the SDGs.

In September 2018, the government’s SDG working group initiated a one-year partnership agreement with Festa, Icelandic Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, for promotional work among corporations on the SDGs. Under the agreement, the working group and Festa work together on an educational programme, including at least four open educational meetings on the SDGs for companies and institutions. In addition, Festa uses its media and events systematically to raise awareness of the SDGs and of how private sector actors can work towards their implementation.

The working group has also consulted and collaborated with SA Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise on promoting the SDGs with those enterprises that have adopted or wish to acquaint themselves with the UN Global Compact, which is closely linked to the SDGs. Working group representatives have also been involved in SDG awareness-raising through IcelandSIF - Iceland Responsible and Sustainable Investment Forum.

### **Civil society**

Many civil society organisations, like corporations, have begun to link their work and strategy to the SDGs. Many civil society organisations are maintained by voluntary efforts, which demonstrates the importance of volunteering in implementing SDGs.

In November 2018, the SDG working group initiated a one-year cooperation agreement with Almannaheill, an umbrella organisation for various civil society organisations working for the public good, to promote the SDGs among these organisations. The purpose of the project is to encourage non-governmental organisations in Iceland to integrate the goals into their daily activities. Under the agreement the working group and Almannaheill arrange together educational meetings and provide promotional material, Almannaheill distributes information on its website and monitors its member organisations' awareness of the SDGs in its annual survey.

The SDG working group also collaborates with the UN Association in Iceland, which has an observer in the working group and has the role of introducing the SDGs to various parties, including civil society organisations. In cooperation with the working group, the UN Association created a poster on the SDGs and distributed it to all schools and educational institutions in Iceland in the fall of 2018.





The Youth Council for the SDGs met with members of the government in March 2019 and handed them a declaration.

## The Youth Council for the SDGs

Articles 12 and 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly state the right of children to express their views and to influence issues that concern them. Bearing this in mind, a decision was taken to mobilise young people to participate in Iceland through the Youth Council for the Sustainable Development Goals. This accords with the government's coalition platform, which stipulates that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be enforced, in part regarding the increased impact of children in society.

The main objective of the Youth Council is to draw attention to the SDGs and sustainable development, both among young people and within the entire community. The Youth Council is intended to be an active forum, where the SDGs and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are discussed critically and constructively. In this way, youth is given a platform to draw attention to the SDGs and sustainable development, thus creating an opportunity for their peers to make their voices heard.

The Youth Council consists of twelve representatives from around the country, aged 13-18 years. The Council meets six times a year, including an annual meeting with the government. The role of the Council is to acquaint itself with and discuss the SDGs, as well as to produce and disseminate interactive material on social media about the goals and sustainable development. The Youth Council also provides the government, through the SDG working group, with supervision and advice on the implementation of the goals. On 15 March 2019, the Youth Council delivered a statement to the government, which it will discuss and respond to.

## **Nordic cooperation**

Nordic cooperation is an important part of Iceland's international relations. Collaboration between the five Nordic states, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the three autonomous regions, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland, is based especially on their shared values. In 2017, governments of the five Nordic states agreed to work together on the promotion of the SDGs, including by sharing Nordic solutions in the field of sustainable energy, gender equality, sustainable food production, welfare services, sustainable urban planning and climate action.<sup>4</sup> For a number of years, sustainable development has been a cross-sectoral theme in all Nordic cooperation.

On the initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic states also follow the "Generation 2030 Programme", which is intended to promote cooperation between the states on common challenges in connection with the SDGs. The purpose is to coordinate implementation of SDGs in the Nordic countries with appropriate analyses, knowledge sharing and the development of methodologies, as well as encouraging participation of different stakeholders in the Nordic countries. SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production is the focus of this cooperation to 2020, as it has been defined as the goal which the Nordic states are farthest from achieving.<sup>5</sup>

## **Sustainable Development Goals portal**

In 2019 the SDG working group launches an information portal on the Sustainable Development Goals. The portal is based on foreign models, and offers individuals, NGOs, companies, institutions, municipalities and others an opportunity to present projects that contribute to the promotion of the SDGs. The portal is thus a public forum for stakeholders to share information about the goals. In this way, information can be spread about ideas and approaches that can contribute to sustainable development and increased value creation in implementing the SDGs.

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<sup>4</sup> The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, 30 May 2017, Nordic prime ministers launch global initiative, [norden.org](http://norden.org).

<sup>5</sup> The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, Generation 2030: Nordic programme for Agenda 2030, [norden.org](http://norden.org).



# Declaration by the Youth Council for the SDGs 2018-19 at a meeting with the government

The world has until 2030 to put into action unprecedented efforts to keep the Earth's average temperature under control, according to the detailed report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published on 8 October 2018. The report states that young people are a big part of the solution, as all of society needs to participate. Which is a dialogue with young people is needed, although we must not limit ourselves to that. Radical action needs to be taken to address this urgent problem threatening our future. We see many problems around us regarding environmental, educational and human rights issues, and we think it's time to think about solutions. While we are very grateful for the opportunities we have had, we feel that more people should have the opportunity to communicate directly with the government. It will be our task to deal with the consequences of the decisions made today. That is why it is important that our voice is among those shaping our societies and the legislation we have to live with. We also cannot forget that you hold the power, and hopefully the will to change, because the next ten years will be crucial in determining the fate of future generations. We all know the tendency to procrastinate in our daily lives and how days, months, even years can go by without anything being achieved. The clock is ticking, time is passing, and the question is: when will the last grain of sand fall?

## **Innovation in the education system:**

- Education is the key to sustainable development.
- Icelandic students perform poorly in science and reading, compared to other OECD countries.
- The school drop-out rate is too high. - Role models and incentives for learning are lacking.
- Action is needed earlier to respond to distress and a lack of self-confidence.
- Education on mental well-being is needed in the curriculum.
- Intervening earlier for the group "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET) would pay for itself many times.
- A review of the educational infrastructure in collaboration with young people is needed.

## **Mental well-being of youth:**

- Youths receiving disability benefits are subject to strong prejudice from other youths.
- Support for disabled people needs to increase.
- The self-confidence of young people needs to be increased, starting at preschool level.
- Education on mental health needs to be provided or included in the curriculum.

## **Wetland recovery:**

- Drainage trenches need to be filled in, drained wetlands emit unnecessarily high levels of carbon dioxide.
- Action with high impact and low cost.

## **No additional heavy industry development:**

- We want to halt further heavy industry development immediately, and furthermore remove discounts and exemptions to benefit heavy industry.
- Heavy industries are major electricity purchasers in Iceland and the production of electricity is constantly being increased to meet their requirements. Many power plant projects would have been unnecessary without the extent of heavy industry.
- Harmonisation of classification in recycling systems:
- The classification system in Iceland is dependent on the municipalities' service providers.
- Classification of recyclables needs to be standardised for all municipalities.

On behalf of young people, we express our thanks for the opportunities we have been offered during the period we serve as members of the UN Youth Council for the Sustainable Development Goals.



## End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Globally, real progress has been made in the fight against poverty. However, a large number of people, especially in developing countries, still live in extreme poverty with all its manifestations, such as hunger, homelessness, lack of secure living, poor or no access to education, lack of healthcare and other basic services, as well as social exclusion.

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Strengthen the situation of disadvantaged people, with particular emphasis on children**
- **Eliminate wage differentials, including those based on national origin**

Iceland is a developed welfare state and the standard of living of Icelandic citizens is generally considered to be good compared to other nations of the world. The most recent measurements show that Iceland has the highest income equality and lowest poverty among European countries<sup>6</sup> but in spite of these positive results, a certain number of people still live with material deprivation and poverty. A main theme of the SDGs is to leave no one behind and therefore it is important to be guided by this in implementing the first goal of eradicating poverty in Iceland.

### Eliminating all forms of poverty

It can be difficult to define poverty, especially when it comes to international comparisons. The government's policy is to specifically strengthen the position of disadvantaged people and make proposals for improving the living standards of the lowest income groups in society. In 2016, the Welfare Watch had an analysis made of extreme poverty which revealed that 1.3-3.0% of the population live in extreme poverty.<sup>7</sup> For this project the Welfare Watch defined extreme poverty as corresponding to the situation of the group that Statistics Iceland assesses as living in substantial material deprivation. The classification "material deprivation" was developed by Eurostat with the aim of responding to certain deficiencies of income measures of poverty.

In Iceland, there is no official criterion for poverty, but the definition "At risk of poverty" has been used, which refers to persons with less than 60% of the median disposable income. According to Statistics Iceland's figures, 8.8% of inhabitants were at risk of poverty in 2016, including 11% of children and 24.9% of single parents. By comparison, in 2011, 9.2% of the population was below this poverty line.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Prime Minister's Office, 3 May 2016, Jöfnuður tekna aldrei meiri á Íslandi (Income equality never higher in Iceland).

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Iceland, 13 September 2016, Sárafatækt (Extreme poverty).

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Iceland, static.is.

## “Poor people need help and kindness and we can all help.”

Pupils in Ártúnsskóli school, 10-12 years old

A social insurance scheme has been in place in Iceland since the first half of the 20th century. By law, anyone legally resident in Iceland is entitled to basic services, which includes access to education, healthcare, secure housing, social insurance schemes and social services. Local authorities provide financial assistance to support individuals and families who cannot provide for themselves and their dependants without assistance. The financial assistance of local authorities is governed by the rules of the municipality concerned as provided for in the Act on Social Services of Local Authorities. In 2016, 4.4% of households in Iceland received such financial assistance.<sup>9</sup> Persons resident in Iceland receive social security payments for childbirth, children, disability, rehabilitation, unemployment, occupational accidents, old age and more. In 2018, the proportion of the population aged 18-66 years receiving a disability pension was 8.4%.<sup>10</sup> Membership of occupational pension funds is compulsory in Iceland for persons active in the labour market, who then receive a pension when they reach retirement age.

Among the objectives of the government’s 2020-2024 fiscal strategy regarding support for individuals, families and children is to strengthen the position of disadvantaged people and make suggestions for improving the living circumstances of the lowest income groups in society.<sup>11</sup> Particular attention is to be paid to the position of children, with an emphasis on those who struggle with multiple difficulties and who live in poverty. Furthermore, in this context, specific attention should be paid to the position of persons with disabilities. The aim is to simplify the social security system, ensure better support for the lowest income groups and facilitate their social participation. The simplification of the benefits system aims to increase incentives for active participation in the labour market, as employment is considered one of the most important ways of preventing social exclusion and poverty. Work is underway to increase payments to parents during maternity/paternity leave in stages and the government approved in the spring of 2019 to extend maternity/paternity leave to 12 months. The extension is expected to be implemented in two phases in 2020 and 2021. The gap between maternity/paternity leave and pre-school needs to be bridged; and extending maternity/paternity leave is an important part of this. Furthermore, legislation on equal pay certification and the introduction of equal pay schemes are conducive to reducing poverty and promoting increased equality in society.



<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Welfare and Statistics Iceland, 2017, Félagsvísar (Social indicators), 6th edition.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Iceland, 2018, px.hagstofa.is.

<sup>11</sup> Althingi (the Icelandic parliament), 149th Legislative Assembly 2018-2019, Draft parliamentary resolution on a fiscal strategy for the years 2020-2024, from the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, Parliamentary document 1181 - Item 750.



## International actions

The main objective of Iceland's international development cooperation is to support efforts by the international community to eliminate poverty and hunger and promote sustainable development. Work towards this objective includes financial contributions to bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, with particular emphasis on cooperation with poor and unstable countries to improve the situation of those living in the poorest conditions. Iceland's bilateral partner countries are Malawi and Uganda, which enjoy the greatest support from Iceland, as well as Mozambique, Palestine and Afghanistan, which also receive significant Icelandic support through multinational organisations and civil society organisations. In all of these countries, the main thrust of support from Iceland is directed towards those groups that are suffering from extreme poverty and systemic inequality, especially in rural areas.

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) peer review of Icelandic international development cooperation in 2017 stated that over 40% of Iceland's development assistance in 2015 went to very poor countries, which is a considerably higher proportion than the average of the member states of the DAC (28%).<sup>12</sup> According to the OECD-DAC figures for 2017, Iceland's public sector contribution to international development cooperation amounted to 0.29% of GNI, while contributions from member states of the DAC averaged 0.31% of GNI.<sup>13</sup> The government's platform and fiscal strategy for 2020-2024 both state that the government aims to increase appropriations for international development cooperation to 0.35% of GNI by 2022.

<sup>12</sup> OECD, 2017, Development Co-operation Report 2017.

<sup>13</sup> OECD, 9 April 2017, Development aid stable in 2017 with more sent to poorest countries.



The Welfare Watch monitors the welfare of those furthest behind in Icelandic society and provides government with suggestions for improvement.

## Welfare Watch

The Welfare Watch monitors the welfare and situation of low-income families, especially single parents and their children, and provides information on the circumstances of those living in extreme poverty. It provides advice to the government and makes suggestions for improvement.

One example of a Welfare Watch project aimed at assisting disadvantaged households was the effort to encourage local authorities to minimise the cost to households of compulsory school attendance. Cost outlays of parents and guardians for the purchase of school supplies has varied from one municipality to the next and in some cases was so high that the Welfare Watch doubted that it complied with either the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Compulsory Schools Act. After the Welfare Watch had two surveys carried out, in 2017 and 2018, on arrangements for parents' contribution to school supplies in all municipalities in Iceland, more and more municipalities have abolished this contribution. In the 2018-2019 school year, 99% of compulsory school children in Iceland live in municipalities that offer free study materials.

Successful schooling is the foundation for good quality of life. A survey conducted by Welfare Watch at the beginning of 2019 showed that around 79% of school administrators believe that the number of requests by parents/guardians for children's leave during the school year has increased over the last few years and 47% believe that the absences negatively affect the children's education. More than 74% of school administrators are of the opinion that parents/guardians are allowed too extensive permission for leave during the school year, and 79% favour the adoption of official criteria such as the number of days that children may be granted leave from school. The survey showed that about 2.2% of children struggle with school avoidance which is attributed, among other things, to mental distress and difficult home conditions. Welfare Watch submitted proposals for action following the survey.



# End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

If properly pursued, agriculture and fisheries can provide everyone with sufficient and nutritious food in addition to creating employment and income. However, the reality is different. Soil, freshwater, oceans, forests, and biodiversity are, in part due to climate change, at greater risk than ever, with foreseeable negative consequences for people's lives and the environment. Climate change has also aggravated the

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Sustainable development in fisheries and agriculture**
- **Organic and wholesome production**
- **Secure livelihood for all citizens**

problems, as it increases the chances of both flooding and prolonged drought. In many developing countries, people living in rural areas find it difficult to make ends meet, causing many to migrate to cities, where often unemployment and poverty await them. International markets for food and agricultural products need to change significantly for nutritious foods to be guaranteed for everyone. In international development cooperation, the Icelandic government has directed its efforts

at reducing poverty and hunger, both in partner countries and through international organisations.

## Eliminating hunger and improving access to food

In Iceland, there is a good supply of nutritious food and no one should have to go hungry. The role of the state and local authorities is to ensure that those who cannot make ends meet receive appropriate assistance. It is important to reach out to all those in such a position, in accordance with the SDG target of leaving no groups behind in their implementation.

The government's platform provides for consultation with representatives of disability pensioners on changes to the benefits system with a view to achieving a consensus on simplifying it, ensuring secure support for disability pensioners and encouraging their participation in the community.<sup>9</sup> Those who are disadvantaged need particular support. An assessment will be made of the situation of the lowest income groups in Icelandic society, proposals for improvements made and followed up on.

Particular attention must be paid to the situation of children living in poverty, as they are among the most vulnerable groups in society. The government's fiscal strategy emphasises the need to pay particular attention to children who live in poverty and the interaction between the benefits system and the tax system regarding child benefits.<sup>10</sup> Welfare Watch conducted a study on the standard of living and poverty



*“No one should have to be in doubt about when and where the next meal will come from.”*

**Auður Bjarnadóttir**, 15 years old

among children in Iceland 2004-2016.<sup>14</sup> Its main findings are that it is most urgent to improve the living conditions of single parents and their children, as nearly four out of every ten children classified as below the poverty level are children of single parents. Children of disabled parents also need to be considered. Among individual factors, the housing situation turned out to have a significant impact on the children's standard of living, especially the children of single parents and the disabled. The study used a modified OECD equivalence scale, which is the scale used by Eurostat.

As previously mentioned, 1.3 to 3% of the country's population is in the group defined by the Welfare Watch as living in extreme poverty. This is the most vulnerable group, and care needs to be taken to see that its basic needs are met, including the need for adequate and nutritious food. It must be ensured that hunger and malnutrition will never be a problem in Iceland, especially among the poor, the elderly and the disabled.

### **Sustainable food production**

The Icelandic government emphasises leading the way in producing wholesome agricultural products. Emphasis is placed on innovation and product development to support regional stability, increase value creation and utilise opportunities based on interest in food culture and food tourism, with sustainability and quality the guiding principles. The main objective is for agriculture in Iceland to be sustainable and to ensure the protection of animal stocks. The policies that support sustainable development and include actions contributing to the health of the population are the government's Bioeconomy Policy, Food Policy, and Food Procurement Policy for the public sector.

Since August 2018, a working group at the Ministry of Industries and Innovation has been drafting a food policy for Iceland. Furthermore, a special ministerial committee will be set up to discuss this policy, as food production will be one of the major political challenges of the future, and formulation of the policy falls under the mandate of numerous ministries. In formulating the policy, emphasis will be placed on the connection between food and public health and the interaction between food production and climate change.<sup>15</sup>

The government is committed to improving the situation of sheep farmers both in the short and long term. In tandem with a new generation of agricultural agreements, special adaptation agreements for new activities in rural areas will be introduced.

<sup>14</sup> EDDA Centre of Excellence, February 2019, Lífskjör og fátækt barna á Íslandi 2004-2016 (Standard of living and poverty among children in Iceland 2004-2016).

<sup>15</sup> The Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Industries and Innovation, 5 April 2019, Ráðherranefnd um matvælastefnu fyrir Ísland (Ministerial Committee for Food Policy for Iceland).





They will pave the way for farmers to develop new agricultural pursuits or establish themselves in other areas. Such adaptation agreements for farming transformation will be for specified periods and take into consideration regional stability, value creation and residence on the farm in question. They can contribute to innovation, nature conservation and new research and education priorities. The government will also undertake actions to further develop the bioeconomy, green solutions and methods to reduce the environmental impact of food production by means of incentives and support aimed, among other things, at carbon offsetting the sector. Organic farming needs to be strengthened for this purpose, and the uniqueness of Icelandic raw material cultivated under sustainable conditions highlighted.

### **International actions**

Iceland's main objective in international development cooperation is to reduce poverty and hunger and to promote general welfare based on gender equality, human rights and sustainable development. Particular attention should be paid to children's rights and to giving them opportunities to thrive and develop their abilities. Malnutrition can have a lasting negative effect on children's mental and physical development. Access to nutritious foods is a key factor, but other factors such as access to clean water and improved sanitation facilities, vaccinations and access to basic healthcare are also of great importance. In Iceland's bilateral partner country Malawi around 42% of children under the age of five have severely impaired growth.<sup>16</sup> In that country, the Icelandic government has provided funds for projects for clean water provision, hospital construction and meals for school children.

Among other things, Iceland supports the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF. Both organisations provide important nutritional assistance to developing countries and regions receiving humanitarian assistance. Iceland's support is in the form of framework agreements and agreements on providing Icelandic experts, in addition to which it responds to emergency calls insofar as possible with emergency contributions. In 2018, Iceland placed major emphasis on supporting the WFP and UNICEF in Syria and Yemen and will endeavour to continue to direct humanitarian aid to war and conflict zones in 2019. It should also be mentioned that Iceland's international development cooperation and other international collaboration in the field of land reclamation and sustainable fisheries is aimed at increasing global food security.



<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, UNICEF Data: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women, [data.unicef.org/country/mwi/](https://data.unicef.org/country/mwi/).





Access to school meals is of great importance to students in countries where poverty is widespread as many households lack nutritious food.

## School meals in Malawi

The Icelandic government launched a pilot project in Malawi with the WFP on locally grown school meals in three elementary schools in Iceland's cooperation district, Mangochi District, in 2012. The project was one aspect of combating hunger and malnutrition, but also had many other goals, such as reducing students' drop-out rate and supporting local farmers with steady business. The project succeeded extremely well and prompted the WFP to launch similar projects in almost all the country. The number of schools offering locally grown meals increased steadily over the next few years. Last year, there were 783 schools in thirteen districts, and the students numbered almost one million. The Icelandic Embassy in Lilongwe took up the project in collaboration with WFP in six schools in Mangochi District, of which three of the schools receive special support from Iceland under the Mangochi Basic Service Programme. School meals are of great importance to students in countries such as Malawi where poverty is widespread and many households lack food. Child malnutrition causes permanent and irreversible growth impairment, which is widespread in Malawi. The meals not only help the children, because the local community benefits from the locally grown school meals: farmers - who are often parents - are the schools' main suppliers and can therefore obtain a secure market for their products and are ensured a stable income. All the practical arrangements for the school meals are in the hands of a large number of volunteers connected with the schools. In each school there is a food committee that handles shopping and cooking and ensures that sufficient water and firewood are available. Precise accounts are kept and regular information provided to the community on finances, procurement and the number of children with full stomachs who take their seats in the classroom in the morning.



## Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

General good health and well-being are important factors in achieving the goals of sustainable development. In recent years, major steps have been taken to improve people's life expectancy, for example, by reducing maternal and infant mortality and preventing the spread of disease. However, plenty of work remains to be done to ensure the health and well-being of a larger portion

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Changing demography of the population**
- **Supply of and access to resources and services by region**
- **Chronic diseases that can be linked to lifestyle**
- **Supply of new drugs and overuse of antibiotics**
- **Healthcare expenditure**
- **Recruiting healthcare personnel**

of mankind than now enjoy these privileges. The most recent OECD Health Report states that healthier lifestyles, higher incomes and better education, together with better health services, have contributed to increasing average lifespans in recent decades.<sup>17</sup> The life expectancy of Icelanders is among the highest in the world and about three of every four adults (74%) in Iceland considered themselves in good or very good health in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

### Maternal and infant mortality and access to healthcare in the field of sexual and reproductive health

Maternal mortality is a rare occurrence in Iceland and its frequency is among the lowest in the world.<sup>19</sup> Pregnancy and maternity care is provided solely by qualified healthcare professionals and the entire cost of check-ups and care during pregnancy and maternity and neonatal care is paid from the public purse. Infant mortality in Iceland is among the lowest in the world, and deaths of young children due to accidents have been reduced in recent years with increased emphasis on prevention of children's accidents.<sup>20</sup> Comprehensive infant and child care is provided at primary healthcare centres with the aim of supporting the health and development of children from birth to six years of age.

The public has good access to contraception and information and education on sexual health in primary healthcare centres and from gynecologists. However, it is

<sup>17</sup> OECD, 2017, Health at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>18</sup> The Directorate of Health, October 2018, Heilsa og líðan Íslendinga 2017 - Framkvæmdaskýrsla (Health and Well-being of Icelanders 2017 - Implementation Report).

<sup>19</sup> WHO, 2015, Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2015. Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF, 2018, Every Child Alive: The urgent need to end newborn deaths. See also this report's Appendix.

*“Illegal drugs, prescription drugs and alcohol. People don’t realise how extensive usage of these is among teenagers. If you want any of these, it’s so easy to get it. We must stop this together by promoting education and prevention.”*

**Helgi Rafn Bergþórsson**, 15 years old

urgent to place still more emphasis on prevention and counselling on contraception to prevent unplanned pregnancies. Particular attention must be paid to younger women and women who are disadvantaged in society. The birth rate among young mothers has been declining rapidly over the past decades: in 2017 there were 5.9 births per 1,000 women in the age group 15-19. The average age women giving birth for the first time has been rising and is now 27.8 years.<sup>21</sup>



### **Eradication of epidemics and reduction in premature deaths**

Iceland has generally managed to keep infectious diseases to a minimum. The Chief Epidemiologist for Iceland monitors the communicable disease situation and can respond within the limits permitted by law. The epidemiologist’s office gathers data on the epidemiology of communicable diseases and forwards this to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in a non-personally identifiable form.

In Iceland, epidemiology of sexually transmitted diseases has long been similar to that of neighbouring countries, however, in recent years there has been an increase in syphilis, HIV and gonorrhoea in Iceland as elsewhere. Emphasis has been placed on those groups who are more exposed to infection. Actions to address this trend include increasing access to condoms, facilitating addicts in obtaining clean needles and the establishment of a professional board on sexual health.



The International Health Regulation (IHR) became a binding international agreement in 2007 and Icelandic legislation takes this into account. The scope of the Communicable Disease Prevention Act was expanded in 2007 and now covers diseases that can cause epidemics and threaten the common good. The Act provides an important framework for swift and effective action against a wide variety of threats in Iceland. Legislation on toxins and pollution is also very comprehensive and provides good protection against pollution and hazardous substances. Enforcement of the law is the responsibility of various public bodies, such as the Environment Agency, the Consumer Agency, health committees of local authorities and the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health.

In 2017, the number of premature deaths in Iceland was 422 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>22</sup> Efforts are underway on health promotion and prevention efforts against premature deaths. The work covers a broad spectrum of health risks and influencing factors,

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Iceland, 25 May 2018, Frjósemi aldrei verið minni en árið 2017 (Fertility never lower than in 2017).

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix.

such as alcohol, tobacco and drug prevention, nutrition counselling, exercise, mental health and dental care, as well as violence and accident prevention. Screening for cervical and breast cancer has a long history in Iceland and efforts are constantly directed at increasing the participation of women in the screenings. There are also plans to start screening for colon and rectal cancer. In March 2019, the Screening Council delivered its opinion to the Directorate of Health on the location, management and implementation of screening for cancer in Iceland, and the next task of the Council is to review the arrangements for specific screenings.

Ensuring adequate staffing in the healthcare system has been a challenge that could affect the development of disease diagnosis and treatment unless the necessary personnel can be recruited. In 2016, a four-year mental health policy was adopted focusing on preventive measures and early intervention.<sup>23</sup> Work is underway on implementing this policy and a project manager for suicide prevention has been appointed in accordance with an action plan to reduce suicide in Iceland.<sup>24</sup>

The government also participates in a two-year pilot project on the establishment and operation of multidisciplinary reception and support remedies for young people aged 12-25 years, which will provide individualised and trauma-responsive service. The goal is to improve services for children and young people and ensure that they receive assistance as soon as possible. This pilot project is undertaken on the initiative of and, in collaboration with, Bergið Headspace, and is modelled on similar remedies in Australia and Denmark. The project will also work in close cooperation with schools, primary healthcare and other parties in children's immediate environment.



### **Access to healthcare services, essential medicines and vaccines**

All citizens have access to healthcare services and treatment in hospital is without charge to the patient. In recent years, the rules on patients' cost contribution for outpatient healthcare have been altered to reduce the expenses of persons requiring extensive healthcare services and pharmaceuticals, and a ceiling set for payments for such. Charges for visits to primary healthcare centres are low and none for children, the disabled and the elderly. School nurses work in all compulsory schools in Iceland.

Vaccinations for children are paid for by the public health service and vaccines are also accessible to all citizens at an affordable price. Dental care for children under 18 years of age is free of charge. Adults need to pay for their dental expenses, but the health service covers part of dental expenses for the elderly and the disabled.

Access to psychological services through primary healthcare has been increased, but psychological services by self-employed psychologists are only subsidised for children. Wage earners, however, have access to grants from their trade unions to



<sup>23</sup> Althingi, 145th Legislative Assembly 2015-2016, Four-year Policy and Action Plan for Mental Health, 338th Agenda item, Parliamentary Resolution 28/145.

<sup>24</sup> Starfshópur um sjálfsvígsforvarnir (Working Group on Suicide Prevention), April 2018, Action Plan for Reducing Suicide in Iceland. Conclusions of working group.



cover psychological and dental expenses. Sufficient public health service and mental care for persons with disabilities needs specific attention.

One of the major healthcare challenges is to provide the population with sufficient supply of essential medicines and ensure their quality and safe use. Antibiotic resistance, arising from overuse of antibiotics, is one of the greatest health threats facing humanity.

## **Prevention and treatment for use of illegal intoxicants and reduction of traffic accidents**

In Iceland, comprehensive preventive work is directed at the main health risks and influencing factors. Iceland ratified the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005, and has adopted a policy on prevention of alcohol and drug abuse that extends to the end of 2020. The state has a monopoly on the sale of alcoholic beverages and current legislation prohibits the sale, provision or supply of alcohol to persons under 20 years of age. Significant progress has been made in reducing the use of alcohol, illegal intoxicants and tobacco among young people in Iceland, and the use of these substances is now on average the lowest in Europe.<sup>25</sup> Alcohol consumption in Iceland is below the average of OECD countries, at 7.5 litres of pure alcohol per person aged 15 years and older in 2015.<sup>26</sup> There is good access to treatment options for intoxicant abuse for adults, but remedies for young people and those with compound problems, i.e. mental health and drug problems or developmental and drug abuse problems, need improvement.

Traffic fatalities have been low in the last decade, averaging 15 per year.<sup>27</sup> With such a low number, each accident strongly influences the statistics, which explains the considerable fluctuations from one year to the next. The average over each five-year period is therefore considered instead of individual years. It should be noted that, due to increasing tourism, annual mileage driven on Icelandic roads has increased by 40% over a period of five years, with an impact on the rate of accidents.

Every year, road safety is actively promoted in Iceland through the implementation of a traffic safety plan, which is used in allocating funding for important road works aimed at traffic safety. The police carry out specific speed and drunk-driving supervision and the Icelandic Transport Authority has specifically focused education, promotions and campaigns.

## **International actions**

Iceland's international development cooperation emphasises improving living conditions and increasing opportunities for people with stronger social infrastructure, including improved access to basic healthcare services. Efforts are being made to achieve this through bilateral development cooperation,



<sup>25</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2016, ESPAD Report 2015: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

<sup>26</sup> OECD, 2017, Health at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix.

appropriations to civil society organisations and contributions to international institutions. The Icelandic government has emphasized public health in Malawi with the aim of decreasing maternal mortality. Its support has included the construction of waiting homes for expecting mothers in rural areas of Mangochi District. Additionally, a district maternity ward with a waiting home has been established, as well as newborn care and family planning units. In addition, the referral system has been supplemented by eleven new ambulances, so that in the event of an emergency or high-risk birth on the rural wards, it is easier to respond in time. Around 80% of women in the district now have access to a maternity ward with good facilities for mothers, newborns and their families. With these increased attention to maternal and newborn health, Mangochi district has seen the reduction of incidence of maternal mortality by 37% over the past decade.<sup>28</sup>

In Malawi, the government and partners have also managed to reduce the incidence of child mortality by 49% from 2010 to 2015.<sup>29</sup> Iceland has funded a number of activities by local health authorities to combat neonatal and infant mortality in Mangochi District. This includes reinforcement of health care services in the most rural areas, which are provided by nearly 600 Health Surveillance Assistants who have received training in recent years.

According to a UNICEF report of 2018, despite the fact that Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, the country has shown considerable success in terms of neonatal and infant mortality. This is thanks to increased access to quality health care for expectant mothers. In 2000, more than half of women in Malawi gave birth to their children without the help of trained healthcare professionals such as midwives and doctors, but in 2016, the rate of childbirth assistance had risen to 90%. This led to a decrease in the incidence of infant mortality from 41 in 1,000 births in 2000 to 18 out of 1,000 births in 2017.<sup>30</sup> In 2018, Iceland also provided humanitarian aid to UNICEF in Syria and to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Yemen at year-end 2018, to reduce infant and maternal deaths in countries where the situation is dire.

Iceland supported UNFPA in Yemen at year-end 2018, which includes funding caesarean sections and other important services that reduce neonatal death. Iceland also supports UNICEF healthcare programmes in Palestine and, among other things, funded an evaluation in 2018 of a project that Iceland supported in 2011-2015 for home-based check-ups for infants, which showed the project's positive effects in reducing maternal and infant mortality.

In February 2018, the Minister for Foreign Affairs signed an agreement with UNFPA for Iceland to support the Agency's mission in Syria. UNFPA's efforts in Syria in 2016 have enabled two million Syrian women to be granted access to life-saving health services in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. Iceland's international development cooperation also places strong emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In 2017, Iceland tripled its core contribution to UNFPA, whose role is to

<sup>28</sup> National Statistics office Malawi, Demographic and Health Survey 2010 and 2015/16.

<sup>29</sup> National Statistics office Malawi, Demographic and Health Survey 2010 and 2015/16.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, February 2018, Every Child Alive: The urgent need to end newborn deaths.





ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights in developing countries. This supports the creation and implementation of projects aimed at eradicating poverty, providing ready access to contraception, making giving birth safe and reducing HIV transmission. Important aspects of these activities include the rights of mothers and children to primary healthcare, infant health protection, the distribution of contraceptives and sexual and family education. A further support to district health authorities in Mangochi will be provided by UNFPA this coming year by offering family planning services to reduce the number of premature childbirths among young girls, fistula operations and centres for survivors of gender-based violence.

In international work, there is also a strong emphasis on the importance of prevention, cure and treatment of neurological disorders, especially spinal cord injury. Particular efforts have been made to increase Nordic cooperation in this area with the aim of facilitating research in the field. At UN level, the Icelandic government has drawn particular attention to the issue in connection with road safety and non-infectious diseases.

SDG target 3.4



From the signing with Árborg municipality in May 2019. Municipalities themselves take the initiative of becoming a Health-promoting Community. In May 2019, 86% of the population lived in a Health-promoting Community.

## Health-promoting Community and the SDGs

Health-promoting Community (HSAM) is a holistic, interdisciplinary program managed by the Directorate of Health in collaboration and consultation with local authorities and other stakeholders. Its primary goal is to support communities in creating an environment and conditions that promote healthy lifestyles, health and well-being of all residents. This is consistent with SDG 3, good health and well-being, and fits in well with the key focus of the SDGs, that no one should be left behind in their implementation.

HSAM is a community that puts the health and well-being of all residents at the forefront in policy making and actions in all areas. Municipalities themselves take the initiative of becoming a Health-promoting Community. The mayor, on behalf of the local authority, signs a cooperation agreement to systematically work towards the well-being of all residents and a framework for implementation is consolidated by establishing a multi-stakeholder steering committee and nominating contact persons.

Systematic public health work involves the use of public health indicators, checklists and other data to assess the situation and prioritise according to the needs of each community. Efforts are directed at factors affecting health and well-being, such as social, economic and cultural circumstances and the built and natural environments, to promote the well-being of all. Successful implementation of HSAM should strengthen all three pillars of sustainability.

Since the beginning of 2018, the government's SDG working group and the Directorate of Health have cooperated, among other things, on raising awareness of the goals and implementing them in HSAM's work. The cooperation of stakeholders operating at national level has also been strengthened by the establishment of the HSAM steering committee and consultation forum on HSAM and the SDGs. Among other things, this cooperation offers opportunities for co-ordination between different issues and data collection that is useful in policy-making and decision-making by the state and local authorities. In May 2019, 86% of Iceland's population lived in a Health-promoting Community.





# Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Provisions in Icelandic law are well in line with the SDGs, such as on the universal right to education, the value of education for individuals and society, and the connection between general education, democracy and human rights, equality, culture and sustainability. The government's primary objective is to create an environment for enhancing education and to provide everyone with

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Promote literacy and ensure the future of the Icelandic language**
- **Increase the number of teachers**
- **Increase the number of students in technical and vocational studies**
- **Actions to reduce drop-out rate in upper secondary schools**
- **Education of pupils with other mother tongue than Icelandic**

appropriate preparation and opportunities for further learning or employment, and active participation in society. The core of Icelandic education policy at preschool and compulsory level is focused on these fundamental pillars of education: literacy, democracy and human rights, equality, health and welfare, sustainability and creativity.

## Education for all

In the autumn of 2018 the Minister of Education, Science and Culture launched the process of preparing a new education policy for Iceland which will be valid until 2030. The education policy will address and prioritise the challenges that Icelandic society faces in education and welfare with regards for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The policy covers all levels of education, including

teacher education. The goal is to provide access to good education at all levels, which optimally meets the needs of individuals, society and the business sector, and to ensure Iceland has an excellent educational system where teachers play a key role. The complete policy is expected to be available in the spring of 2020.

Education lays the foundation for active participation in a democratic society, and the government's policy places particular emphasis on the participation and activity of young people. Iceland holds the presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019, and young people are one of the main priorities of the Icelandic Presidency programme. In connection with this, a number of specific events will seek young people's views on various aspects related to the SDGs.



*“Quality education for everyone is essential if we want to get rid of injustice and inequality in our society.”*

**Oskar Einar Bukowski**, 15 years old

## **Equal right to education**

According to Icelandic compulsory school act and the National Curriculum Guide, compulsory schools are obliged to educate all children effectively. School is compulsory for children 6 to 16 years of age and the state’s educational obligation is to the age of 18. The preschool level is defined as the first level of the school system and in 2017 just over 19,000 children were in Icelandic preschools, most of them run by local authorities. In 2017, 97% of three- to five-year-olds attended preschool, 95% of two-year-olds, and 47% of one-year-olds.<sup>31</sup> The challenge has been to provide children with preschools directly after the conclusion of parental leave, or from the age of one year.

All pupils have the right to appropriate education in compulsory schools, including academic, vocational and artistic studies, and local authorities are obliged to provide students with the appropriate learning opportunities, regardless of their physical and mental capacity, social and emotional condition or level of language development. The intention is for all pupils to complete on an equal footing quality education in inclusive compulsory schools free of charge. Education at the compulsory school level is not completely free of charge, as the legislation makes provision for charges, e.g. for writing implements, school meals and leisure activities. Many municipalities have recently abandoned such charges or greatly reduced them, among other things to promote more equality among pupils. In the autumn of 2017, 45,195 students attended compulsory schools in Iceland, the highest number ever. Almost all 15-year-olds in Iceland (99.5%) attended mainstream compulsory schools.<sup>32</sup>



Upper secondary schools are intended to promote the all-round development of students and their active participation in a democratic society. The schools are also intended to prepare students for participation in the labour market and further study. In 2018, around 22,000 students attended Icelandic upper secondary schools. School enrolment at secondary level is good, with about 95% of 16-year-old students attending upper secondary school in the autumn of 2017.<sup>33</sup> However, the drop-out rate in upper secondary schools is considerable and the proportion of those in vocational education at upper secondary level is low by international comparison. The proportion of students in vocational study in the autumn of 2017 was higher among males (39%) than females (24%).<sup>34</sup> Only five per cent of young people aged 18-24 years of age are neither in school nor work, which is the lowest proportion among OECD countries.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>32</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>33</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>34</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>35</sup> OECD, 2018, Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris.



Icelandic education policy is based on equal rights to inclusive schooling in preschool, compulsory and upper secondary schools. The conclusions of an external audit by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education on the implementation of Iceland's inclusive education policy, confirm that the present legislation and strategy of the educational authorities supports the objectives and emphasis of inclusive education and comply with international conventions and agreements to which Iceland is a party.<sup>36 37</sup> It stated that relatively fewer students are in special schools, special units or special classes in Iceland than in most European countries, while the incidence of formally diagnosed special needs of pupils is above average. Work is underway on implementing the audit's recommendations for improvements and the status of that project will be reviewed at year-end 2019. It is important to find ways to provide persons with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, equal educational opportunities as others at all age levels.



School attendance is spread over a longer period in Iceland than is generally the case in Europe and a high proportion of young people aged 25-29 years attend schools and universities. Young people increasingly take advantage of work opportunities and postpone their schooling, then return after gaining work experience. There is a strong demand for tertiary education in Iceland and the number of university graduates is increasing rapidly. In 2017, 21% of Icelanders aged 25-64 years had completed undergraduate studies at the tertiary level. There is a gender difference, however, as the proportion of men in Iceland aged 25-34 years with tertiary education has increased by ten percentage points in ten years, while the proportion of women with tertiary education has risen by 20 percentage points.<sup>38</sup>

## Importance of literacy

Literacy is the key to other studies and one of the fundamental pillars of education according to the National Curriculum Guide, with emphasis on the importance of writing and reading. The results of the 2015 PISA survey show that the performance of Icelandic students at completion of compulsory school was worse than in 2012.<sup>39</sup> The main challenge is to reverse that trend. One of the main objectives in the White Paper on Education Reform of 2014 is to improve students' reading skills and reading comprehension upon completion of compulsory school so that at least 90% of students can read and understand what they read.<sup>40</sup> Recent studies indicate that attitudes towards the language are changing and that the competency of children and young people in Icelandic, right from the age of language acquisition, is deteriorating.<sup>41</sup> The government wishes to promote the Icelandic language and its role as the official national language. Steps have already been taken to establish special support for publication of books in Icelandic and multifaceted actions are planned to reinforce Icelandic instruction at all levels of education.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2017, Final Report, Education for All in Iceland: External Audit of the Icelandic System for Inclusive Education.

<sup>37</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, european-agency.org.

<sup>38</sup> Statistics Iceland, statice.is

<sup>39</sup> Education Institute, 6 December 2016, Results of PISA 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, June 2014, White Paper on Education Improvement.

<sup>41</sup> Sigríður Ólafsdóttir and Baldur Sigurðsson, 31 December 2017. Hnignandi frammistaða íslenskra nemenda í lesskilningshluta PISA frá 2000 til 2015 (Declining performance of Icelandic pupils in PISA reading comprehension tests 2000-2015), Netla - Online journal of education and teaching, School of Education, University of Iceland.

## **Increasing the number of teachers**

Based on the current situation, teacher shortages are foreseeable in Iceland at all levels of education, and this has been responded to with broad-based cooperation between the state, local authorities, trade unions of teachers and teacher education institutions. The Icelandic government has responded to the impending shortage of teachers by introducing specific measures aimed at increasing the number of students in teacher education, encouraging graduates to work in the educational system and promoting support for new recruits in teaching. The number of undergraduate students commencing preschool and compulsory school teacher education decreased by 40% in 2008-2018, and now only about 28% of full-time equivalent positions in Icelandic preschools are manned by preschool teachers. The number of instructors (without teaching qualifications) in compulsory schools has also increased considerably in recent years. As a result of the government's actions, for instance, beginning in the autumn of 2019 students in the final year of a master's program for teaching qualifications at preschool and compulsory level will be offered paid internships and study grants. Measures are being taken to increase the number of teachers specialised in job-related instruction.<sup>42</sup> Efforts are also being directed at reviewing the teacher training curriculum with a view to the needs of trainee teachers, schools and the entire society. A new act on education and recruitment of teachers is in preparation emphasising, among other things, competence and flexibility in the work of teachers at all school levels. A review is also underway of the support system for professional staff development of teachers at all school levels.

## **More students in technical and vocational studies**

The situation and outlook for vocational education at upper secondary level in Iceland has long been the subject of discussion. One of the government's priorities is to encourage more students to choose vocational and technical education. Opportunities for improvements are connected, among other things, with increased cooperation among upper secondary schools, provision of distance and hybrid learning, and collaboration with compulsory schools and parents. Changes to the funding model for upper secondary school which take full effect in 2019 encourage prioritisation in favour of vocational education.

## **Countering drop-outs**

Almost 20% of Icelandic youths leave school without completing upper secondary education. This rate is twice as high as the EU average.<sup>43</sup> The results of studies show that the reasons for dropping out can be, in addition to insufficient preparation from compulsory schooling, a low educational or social commitment, disbelief in one's own abilities, mental distress or little support and motivation of parents, and lack of support in upper secondary school. A number of measures are underway aimed at increasing the number of upper secondary school graduates, for example

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, March 2019, Actions in Education. Teacher recruitment.

<sup>43</sup> OECD, 2018, Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris.



by screening for drop-outs and by mapping their reasons and promoting mental health services in the schools. Work is also in progress to make it easier for adults to acquire recognised educational or professional qualifications, i.e. those who have not completed a formal course of study after compulsory schooling. The Adult Education Act is under review with the aim of setting a clear framework for the activities of educational institutions and cooperation with the business community.

## Students with immigrant background

The number of pupils with immigrant background continues to increase in the Icelandic school system; they currently comprise about 10% of pupils in compulsory schools.<sup>44</sup> There are indications that such students are less successful in their studies than others who are native speakers, not least when it comes to upper secondary education, where they are more likely to drop out. The Action Plan on Immigrants' Issues 2016-2019 emphasises equal status and opportunities for education and that the knowledge and experience of immigrants is valued appropriately.<sup>45</sup> Efforts are directed at combating drop-outs by immigrants from secondary schools by providing support at all school levels, including through increased emphasis on native language teaching and promoting active bilingualism or plurilingualism. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture has established a working group to analyse the current position of such students and formulate a policy before the end of 2019.

## International actions

Despite significant improvements internationally in children's access to compulsory education, the world is still some way from achieving international development goals and the quality of education is widely insufficient. Education is therefore a key component of Iceland's international development cooperation. Emphasis is placed on children's education as well as the development of professional expertise within Iceland's areas of emphasis. At present Iceland is operating, among other things, educational projects in Malawi, Uganda and Palestine.

The Icelandic government also supports the activities of the UNU Training Programmes in Iceland, where professionals from developing countries have the opportunity to study free of charge. These schools endeavour to develop professional expertise in developing countries in the fields of geothermal energy, fisheries, land reclamation and gender equality, and in so doing promote the progress of other goals. Iceland also participates in various types of international cooperation in the field of teacher education.



<sup>44</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>45</sup> Althingi, 145th Legislative Assembly 2015-2016, Draft parliamentary resolution on an Action Plan on Immigrants' Issues for the years 2016-2019.



PHOTO BY VERKIDN

The aim of the study and work fair #MyFuture is to present the programmes on offer in upper secondary schools, especially in the certified trades and vocational fields.

## #MyFuture

Approximately 12,000 guests attended a study and work fair held jointly by the business community, the government and the school community in March 2019, with the aim of presenting the programmes on offer in upper secondary study, especially in the certified trades and vocational fields. Entitled #MyFuture, the event was attended by, among others, some 7,000 compulsory school students from 91 schools all over the country. The presentation was organised by Skills Iceland, which is a non-governmental organisation whose aim is to increase the visibility and improve the image of the certified trades and vocational education.

This was the third time that the fair was held in conjunction with the Icelandic Championships for Certified Trades and Vocational Subjects. In this instance students competed in 27 different subjects. The number of visitors to the presentation has increased each year. It offers a unique opportunity for young people and families to experience and get to know a wide range of study and job opportunities. Guests are encouraged to come and try out as many pursuits as possible, for example, at drawing graphics in virtual reality, carpentry, controlling robots, making batteries or curling hair. The event is important because seeing, experiencing, and engaging in often tend to stir more interest and insight than reading brochures or browsing websites.

Increasing the number of students in industrial, technology and engineering study is one of the challenges facing Iceland in education. Work on this takes account of SDG target 4.4, on the importance of increasing the number of people with vocational and technical expertise and promoting the utilisation of such skills.



## Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The attention devoted to gender equality has increased significantly internationally in recent years and Iceland is regarded internationally as an example with regard to legislation and its progress in this area. The World Economic Forum's latest report, published in December 2018, states that gender equality is nowhere greater than in Iceland, based on the Forum's methodology. Iceland topped

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Gender divisions in the labour market and gender-based study choices**
- **Unequal gender balance at the top level of business and industry**
- **Systematically reduce sexual and gender-based violence**
- **Increase the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave**

the Gender Gap Index, which includes 144 countries, for the tenth year in a row.

Gender equality is an important human rights issue and also a prerequisite for peace, progress and development. The legal equality of Icelandic women is greater than in many other parts of the world, both in view of historical developments in the equal rights campaign and with reference to the criteria of the International Economic Council. The first comprehensive Icelandic legislation on equal rights and the status of the genders was adopted in 1976. Government policy on gender equality was then formulated and the Gender Equality Council established to enforce the legislation. Now some 40 years later, it is clear that gender still seems to inhibit the

freedom of individuals and that more needs to be done in many areas. Gender-based violence is a persistent problem and it is necessary for the government at all times to focus on projects that aim to eliminate it. Gender-based violence is a public health problem, with economic, political, social and health consequences for every community.

### Policy and legislation to promote increased gender equality

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (the Gender Equality Act) aims to establish and maintain equality and equal opportunities for women and men and thus equalise the status of the both genders in all areas of society. The substantive provisions of the Act apply both outside and within the labour market, for example, in prohibiting discrimination, wage equality, co-ordinating family and working life, sexual harassment, education and more. The Gender Equality Act permits, for example, specific measures to equalise the position of the genders in the labour market and stipulate that appropriate consideration is given to pregnancy





*“Girls and boys need to have just as much.”*

**Karitas Lilja Hafdal Marinósdóttir**, 6 years old

and childbirth. The aforementioned Act has been amended several times in recent years to promote increased gender equality and reduce discrimination. The amendments deal, for instance, with equal pay certification and prohibit gender-based discrimination in connection with the procurement of goods and services.

The current Gender Equality Action Plan for 2016-2019 specifies the government's most urgent tasks in the field of gender equality. Among the projects underway are efforts to integrate gender equality issues into decision-making and policy formulation by the government and gender-responsive budgeting. Iceland has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. In an international comparison, the Icelandic labour market has long been characterised by women's high employment participation. In 2018 it was 78% compared to 85% by men. In recent decades, women's employment rate has steadily increased; however, about one-third of women work part-time, as opposed to 13% of men.<sup>46</sup>

Discussion on male involvement in gender equality issues has grown more prominent, and the current government Action Plan on Gender Equality pays special attention to men and gender equality. Efforts have also been directed at integrating gender equality perspectives into various issues and the Act on Public Finances provides for gender-responsive budgeting.

### **Prevention of violence against women and girls**

In April 2018, Iceland ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of 2011. The Convention provides for the rights of victims and the obligations of public bodies to protect and assist women subjected to violence, to educate the public, government and professionals, to take preventive measures against violence, and provide solutions and treatment for abusers. In addition, the Minister of Justice has adopted an Action Plan on Handling of Sexual Offences by the Judicial System, and the government has provided additional funding for implementation of actions based on it. They include increasing the number of employees of the police and District Prosecutor, increasing continuing education and improving police investigation facilities and procedures for handling sexual offences. Special attention needs to be paid to the conditions and needs of groups of women that are particularly vulnerable to any kind of violence, such as disabled women and women of foreign origin.



<sup>46</sup> Statistics Iceland, Prime Minister's Office, Centre for Gender Equality, 2019, Konur og karlar á Íslandi 2019 (Women and men in Iceland 2019).

## Shared responsibility for the household and family

One of the objectives of the Gender Equality Act is to enable women and men to co-ordinate family and working life. The role of the Gender Equality Council includes advising the Minister and the Centre for Gender Equality on measures to equalise the position of both genders in the labour market and for the integration of family and working life. The Act also imposes an obligation on employers to take the necessary measures to enable women and men to co-ordinate their working duties and responsibilities towards the family. To this end, the Act emphasises measures by employers to increase flexibility in the organisation of work and working hours, so that both families' and businesses' needs are taken into account. This includes facilitating employees' return to work after maternity/paternity leave, or in taking leave due to unavoidable and urgent family circumstances. The Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave aims at ensuring a child spends time with both its father and mother, as well as enabling both women and men to co-ordinate family and working life. Since the adoption of the Act in 2000, parents have generally exercised their right to maternity/paternity leave. From 2008 onwards, the proportion of fathers not availing themselves of all or part of their own or joint right to maternity/paternity leave has been increasing.<sup>47 48</sup>

Research has shown that the Icelandic men's proportion of domestic work has increased and traditional gender perspectives appear to have retreated following the economic collapse in 2008 and the increased number of men taking paternity leave and looking after their younger children following the adoption of the Act in 2000, although the proportion has decreased from one year to the next in recent years.<sup>49</sup>

## Women's full participation in all areas of political, economic and public life

The Gender Equality Act stipulates that when appointing committees, councils and boards the state and municipalities shall take care to have their gender balance as equal as possible and not less than 40% of each gender if there are more than three members. This also applies to the boards of public corporations and companies where the state or municipality is the main owner. It also states that both men and women shall be nominated as candidates for committees, councils and boards on behalf of the state and local authorities. Those nominating may deviate from the aforementioned conditions when objective reasons make it impossible to nominate both male and female candidates, and shall then explain their reasons. The Act on Public Limited Companies also provides for a similar arrangement for appointment to boards of companies with 50 employees or more.

<sup>47</sup> Statistics Iceland, Viðtakendur og greiðslur vegna fæðingarorlofs 2001-2016 (Recipients and payments for maternity/paternity leave 2001-2016), px.hagstofa.is.

<sup>48</sup> BSRB, 5 April 2017, Enn færri feður nýta rétt sinn til fæðingarorlofs (Still fewer fathers utilise their right to parental leave).

<sup>49</sup> Ministry of Welfare, May 2015, Staða kvenna og karla á íslenskum vinnumarkaði - Staðreyndir og staða þekkingar (Status of women and men in the Icelandic labour market - Facts and current knowledge).

The Icelandic labour market is characterised by high gender division. Women and men perform different types of work, and gender-based study choices and gender division between occupations is still evident. Men are much higher up the power ladder in business than women, and men still seem to have better opportunities for career advancement than women.<sup>50</sup> The consequences are, among other things, that women's work is underestimated, and much of the wage differential and the unequal pension rights of the genders can be attributed to the gender-specific labour market.

The proportion of women in the parliament has gradually been rising over the past few decades, although it fluctuates considerably and was 38.1% in 2018, compared to 47.6% in 2016. The proportion of women in local government in 2018 was 47.2% and has never been higher. At the beginning of 2019 the proportion of women who were managing directors of local authorities was 36% and almost 42 percent of managing directors of government agencies.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the education of women has increased greatly, and more women are involved in management in the private sector than before. Studies show that the adoption of the Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave has improved the position of women in the labour market. Similar changes have taken place in gender equality in other Nordic countries in recent decades, and there is considerable consultation between them in this area.

In 2019, the Prime Minister's Office and the Association of Women Business Leaders in Iceland (FKA) concluded an agreement on government support for the Equality Balance (Jafnvægisvogin). The aim of the project is to promote a more equal share of women and men at the executive level of corporate governance in Iceland, with the target for 2027 to have the gender ratio of corporate executive 40/60. FKA will collect and harmonise statistical data on the proportion of women's and men's share on corporate boards and the executive management of private and public companies. The Equality Balance dashboard will also be updated on a regular basis, information provided on the importance of diversity in boards and management teams, and presentations held on the dashboard and project targets for businesses, governments and the public.<sup>52</sup>

## International actions

Icelandic foreign policy places major emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women, which is reflected both in international development cooperation and in international advocacy. Gender equality is generally a priority when Iceland is chairing regional cooperation. In 2019 Iceland holds, among other things, the Presidency of the Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic-Baltic Constituency of the World Bank. Gender equality issues are Iceland's main



<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Welfare, March 2018, Skýrsla félags- og jafnréttismálaráðherra um stöðu og þróun jafnréttismála 2015-17 (Report of the Minister of Social Affairs and Gender Equality on the status and development of gender equality 2015-17).

<sup>51</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>52</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 29 March 2019, Forsætisráðherra undirritar samning við Félag kvenna í atvinnulífínu um Jafnvægisvogina (The Prime Minister signs an agreement with FKA on the Equality Balance).



focus in the United Nations Human Rights Council, which is clearly reflected in our presentations and advocacy. Respect for women's human rights and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender is the basic theme of the government's proposals, including concerning gender and reproductive rights, women's rights to participate in all areas of society, including areas concerning peace and security, and the importance of men promoting gender equality, as this is the key to sustainable development and general well-being.

The Icelandic government has emphasised that projects and contributions, both in bilateral or multilateral development cooperation, promote gender equality and empower women and girls. Gender equality and women's empowerment is a specific goal in Iceland's Policy for Development Cooperation for 2019-2023, and an emphasis will be on gender mainstreaming in all project and contributions.

In its bilateral development cooperation with bilateral partner countries Malawi and Uganda, and in priority countries such as Mozambique, Palestine and Afghanistan, Iceland has mainstreamed gender issues into programmes and projects on maternal and newborn health, education, water and sanitation and peace and security. Iceland supports UN Women, a priority organisation in Iceland's multilateral development cooperation, that plays an important co-ordinating role among UN agencies globally and in countries and works to increase the participation of women in all areas of government and economic affairs. Another priority organisation in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment for Iceland is UNFPA providing and advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights with its focus on gender equality and human rights-based approach to development.

The Icelandic government also supports the UNU-Gender Equality Studies and Training (GEST) Programme that through interdisciplinary research, teaching and dissemination promotes gender equality and social justice in developing countries and fragile states.

Iceland has used the Gender Equality Policy Marker of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) since 2011 to track its contributions towards gender equality. Iceland currently ranks with the third-highest contributions to gender equality on the DAC donor list.<sup>53</sup> Data from 2016 to 2018 shows that around 80% of Iceland's contributions to bilateral development cooperation was targeting gender sensitive projects and contributions<sup>54 55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> OECD, March 2019, Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Donor Charts.

<sup>54</sup> OECD, March 2019, Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Donor Charts.

<sup>55</sup> OECD, July 2018, Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. An Overview.



Photo from the Women's Strike on 24 October 2018. Women across Iceland walked off the job in protest against gender wage gap and other issues that specifically affect women in Iceland.

## Steering Committee for Comprehensive Reforms concerning Sexual Violence

At the beginning of 2018, the Prime Minister appointed a Steering Committee for Comprehensive Reforms concerning Sexual Violence. The group's main role is to promote progressive and harmonised governmental action against sexual violence and sexual and gender-based harassment, and to place Iceland at the forefront in combating all types of gender-based violence.

Among the Steering Committee's tasks is to make proposals for implementing actions provided for in a new action plan for improvements in the handling of sexual offences within the criminal justice system and to decide on further improvements. The Steering Committee is to monitor the implementation of the action plan and use its influence to provide adequate funding for it. The Steering Committee promoted the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Iceland ratified the agreement on 26 April 2018.

The group has presented proposals for a co-ordinated response to the #metoo revolution in Government Offices and their institutions, as an employer, and will also make proposals for a community-wide response. In addition, the Steering Committee is developing a policy for action against digital/online sexual violence.

The Steering Committee is to advise the Prime Minister and the Ministerial Council on Gender Equality in formulating policy on sexual violence, gender-based violence and sexual harassment in Icelandic society. The Steering Committee is to pay particular attention to the multifaceted discrimination against women of foreign origin, women who live in economic insecurity, disabled women, and LBT women.

The Steering Committee has adopted a three-year work programme and plans to complete its work no later than the spring of 2021.



# Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Clean and accessible water is an essential part of human life. Clean water is essential for everyday needs, while precipitation and access to water are the basis for agriculture and industry to flourish. The need for water will foreseeably increase in coming decades due to population growth, higher consumption and changes in consumption patterns. Access to water is already a

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Increase the proportion of sewage that is treated**
- **Complete implementation of the EU Water Directive**

challenge in many areas of the world where precipitation is erratic and infrastructure is poor. Changes in precipitation patterns caused by climate change may make the situation in sensitive areas even worse.

In Iceland there is an abundance of fresh drinking water, and the country is among the richest in terms of water resources.<sup>56</sup> In general, the state of potable water is good, water quality is monitored regularly, and strict rules apply to water reservoirs and their surroundings. Sewage disposal needs to be improved in many areas, but most towns and villages in the country are situated along the coastline with sewage discharge into the ocean.

## Access to clean water and sanitation facilities

Everyone in Iceland can be said to have access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Total utilisation of cold water is about 280 million m<sup>3</sup> per year, or about 0.9% of the volume of groundwater flowing to the sea.<sup>57</sup>

Although Icelanders have an abundance of water, it is important to ensure access to clean water by protecting it and ensuring its sustainable use. The Water Management Act is intended to promote these objectives and the long-term protection of water resources. Work is underway on a river basin management plan, an action plan and monitoring plan that are integrated for the whole country. These plans are expected to be implemented in 2022. They apply to surface water and groundwater, as well as estuary waters and coastal waters, their ecosystems and related ecosystems. Regulations on the prevention of water pollution and drinking water set requirements for drinking water, as well as protection of water resources, utilisation licenses, monitoring and research requirements. The regulations were set, on the one hand, to protect human health by ensuring that drinking water is healthy and clean and, on the other hand, to protect water sources.

<sup>56</sup> Globalstat, globalstat.eu.

<sup>57</sup> Statistics Iceland, statice.is.



*“The simple water post in the village showed me how a small project can make a big difference with issues such as education, equality and health in destitute areas. You don’t need to be an international superpower to do that. “*

**Elíza Gíjja Ómarsdóttir**, 15 years old

According to the Act on Municipal Water Utilities, municipalities are obliged to operate water utilities in towns and villages to satisfy the water needs of the public, households and businesses. The regulation on municipal water utilities sets rules on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of users, on the one hand, and on the services provided by water utilities to residents and businesses, on the other. Regulations on construction and hygiene include provisions that ensure adequate sanitation, toilets, washbasins and bathing facilities.

### **Water quality and sewage treatment**

Most larger water utilities in Iceland are owned by local authorities but smaller water utilities are privately owned. Larger water utilities, serving more than 500 residents, supply about 94% of the population, while around six per cent receive water from smaller utilities or individual wells. Microbial conditions are, in most cases, very good in the case of larger utilities and it is rare for undesirable substances to exceed maximum permitted levels. Microbial conditions have proved to be poorer in the case of smaller suppliers, especially where groundwater is difficult to access. Sewage from around 74% of the country’s population was treated in 2014, with the capital region most prominent here.<sup>58</sup> Pollution from sewage generally does not threaten freshwater resources, since sewers in towns and villages generally end in the ocean; however, increased sewage treatment improves conditions along beaches and in coastal waters. The construction of sewage systems is the responsibility of local authorities.

### **Water resources and ecosystems**

There is no prospect of water shortage in Iceland. One benefit of better utilisation of water is to keep the size of utility systems and sewage systems within moderate limits.

It is estimated that about 42,000 hectares of wetlands have been drained in Iceland, or the equivalent of 46% of total wetlands and about 90% of wetlands in lowland areas.<sup>59</sup> Iceland’s Climate Action Plan for 2018–2030 sets out plans for major efforts to restore wetlands. The benefits of restoration include lower greenhouse gas emissions, improved water management and more diverse birdlife.

<sup>58</sup> Environment Agency, September 2017, Samantekt um stöðu fráveitumála á Íslandi 2014 (Overview of the sewage situation in Iceland in 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, September 2018, Climate Action Plan for 2018-2030, 1st edition.





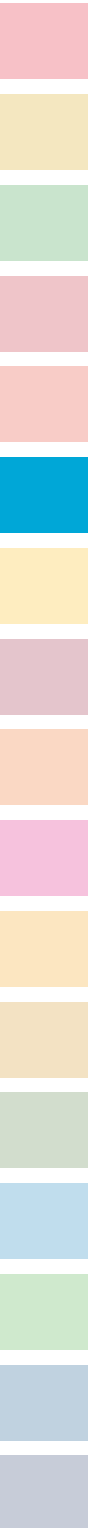
## International actions

For many years, Iceland has been working to improve access to clean water and sanitation facilities in developing countries. For example, in a four-year project that started in Malawi in 2017, nearly 1,000 water supply sites were set up to improve access of at least 200,000 people to clean water. In tandem with this, Iceland is cooperating with communities in the Mangochi District in Malawi on expanding sanitation facilities. One project area in partner schools in Mangochi is the preparation of sanitation facilities for students and teachers.

In Mozambique Iceland is working in partnership with UNICEF to improve the water and sanitation conditions in Zambezia province, which is one of the most populous and poorest provinces in the country. The aim of the project is to increase secure access to healthy drinking water and adequate sanitation for target groups in rural areas, villages and urban areas, as well as to improve hygiene practices. The objective is to provide 150,000 people with adequate sanitation facilities, 25,000 people with access to new water supplies and nearly 6,000 pupils in 15 schools with improved water and sanitation facilities.

In Uganda, education on the importance of water and sanitation in schools and energy-saving cooking in school kitchens has been conducted through a diverse educational programme. Buikwe District is building water supplies, funded by Icelandic development aid, which will provide residents of 39 fishing villages with access to clean water at affordable prices. Around 18,000-20,000 pupils in compulsory schools and 50,000-60,000 inhabitants of nearby villages will benefit from these measures.

Iceland also cooperates with UNICEF in Sierra Leone and Liberia to improve access to clean water and sanitation in the countries' fishing villages. Cooperation with UNICEF in Sierra Leone will provide a water access to 40,000 people as well as improving access to sanitation facilities. In Liberia efforts are directed at ensuring 20,000 residents' access to clean water and sanitation. In tandem with this development, the people of the fishing villages are systematically informed about the importance of clean water and sanitation. Iceland provides humanitarian aid to Yemen through UNICEF to improve access to potable water. Similarly, in Uganda, Iceland recently began to participate in a UNICEF water development project, focusing on refugees in Uganda from South Sudan and their host communities.





The WASH project in Mozambique is aimed at providing over 200,000 inhabitants in six districts with new water supplies and adequate toilet facilities.

## WASH project in Mozambique

In recent years, the Icelandic government has worked with UNICEF on a comprehensive water, toilets and sanitation project in the Zambezia province of Mozambique, one of the country's poorest regions. The project is aimed at providing over 200,000 inhabitants in six districts with new water supplies and adequate toilet facilities, and a special effort is being made in numerous schools which will include water and toilet facilities for tens of thousands of children.

The aim of the project is to improve access for people in rural areas to clean water and adequate toilet facilities in selected districts of the province, thereby promoting improved health, education and living standards in general.

The concluding report of the first phase of the project stated that 285 water utilities had been constructed for almost 30,000 elementary school children in 84 schools, in addition to which 60,000 inhabitants in villages near the schools were given access to clean drinking water. Furthermore, outdoor toilets were built at 29 schools, serving around 20,000 pupils.

In connection with the project, UNICEF held a large number of courses to raise awareness of the importance of sanitation, which were attended by over a hundred thousand inhabitants. Initially, the courses were to reach even more people, but during the period of the project intermittent conflict broke out in the area between the government and RENAMO, the opposing forces in the Mozambique civil war in 1977-1992.

The recent months have been peaceful in Zambezia and the projects have been proceeding successfully. A number of water and sanitation experts were recruited by the provincial government to work in the applicable WASH program districts. The district governments also received assistance with future planning and policy making and water committees were given appropriate training.



## Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Many major challenges, as well as opportunities, that the world currently faces relate to energy issues. Quality of life, regional stability, social equality and economic development are inextricably linked to energy access. For this reason, the supply of clean and sustainable energy is important to all nations in the future. Iceland's position in energy matters is unique, as the vast majority of the energy

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Ensure energy security in Iceland by maintaining a balance between supply and demand in the electricity market**
- **Increase the share of renewable energy sources through energy transition in sea, air and land applications**
- **Equalise energy costs related to electricity distribution and space heating at national level**
- **Ensure minimum requirements regarding the security of electricity supply throughout the country**

used in the country is renewable, environmentally friendly energy. The only operations in Iceland that still are based on fossil fuels and have yet to undergo the energy transition are mobile activities on sea, air and land.

The government has made it its priority to ensure energy security and security of electricity supply throughout the country and to promote the equalisation of energy costs between areas.

### High proportion of renewable energy

The proportion of renewable energy sources in Iceland was almost 73% in 2016<sup>60</sup> and nearly all electricity (99.9%) is produced from renewable energy sources: hydropower, geothermal energy and wind power.<sup>61</sup> Geothermal energy and electricity is used for indoor heating in almost all buildings in Iceland (99%). Iceland is unique in this respect in an international context. In recent decades, the government has supported the construction of geothermal

district heating systems by providing initial grants to new systems, as well as grants for geothermal exploration, emphasising in particular replacing electric heating with geothermal heating.

By far the greatest share of land and sea transportation is still powered by fossil fuels. The government has applied tax incentives to encourage the purchase of vehicles using renewable energy, such as electricity, hydrogen, biofuel, methane and methanol. The government has also allocated grants through the Icelandic Energy

<sup>60</sup> Eurostat, 17 August 2018, Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption.

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Industries and Innovation, May 2018, Progress report for Iceland under Directive 2009/28/EC 2017.

*“We need to produce energy in a sustainable way and be careful not to waste it and recycle as much energy as possible. We need to think about innovation a lot when solving this challenge.”*

**Áspór Björnsson**, 16 years old

Fund for installing charging stations for electric cars. Land-based energy transition is thus well underway with the number of environmentally friendly vehicles currently rising significantly, and the percentage of renewable energy used in transport has been successfully raised to over nine per cent in 2018. Energy transition for the country's sailing fleet is still in its early stages, as the development of environmentally friendly energy sources for ocean transportation has been slower. It is anticipated that the fleet will come to utilise the currently available options for renewable energy sources more fully. According to the government's coalition platform, the aim is to put a ban to the use of heavy fuel oil in Icelandic territorial waters. By international comparison, the cost of electricity and geothermal energy is relatively low in Iceland, since the citizens pay a smaller percentage of their income for these energy sources than those of other European states.<sup>62</sup>

### **Access to renewable energy**

Above all, the government's objectives on energy security require a comprehensive long-term energy policy. This policy must be based on estimated long-term energy demands pursuant to the government's policy, e.g. concerning energy transition and how to ensure energy supply for the public and business sectors.

It is necessary to reinforce the transmission and distribution network, establish better links to key regions, examine the extent to which underground cables can be used efficiently, and improve procedures with regard to decisions related to transmission projects. The load on the Landsnet transmission system and distribution system has increased steadily, which has led to growing operational risks and a decline in opportunities for industrial development at national level. Similarly, there has been a rise in sudden operational disruptions and outage minutes. Energy security within the current electricity distribution system varies somewhat geographically, with the poorest security of supply being in the West Fjords and Northeast Iceland. Work is currently underway with regard to improving access to three-phase electricity in rural areas.



<sup>62</sup> SA Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise, Economic Division, March 2017, Mikið vatn hefur runnið til sjávar, Mikilvægi veitu- og orkugeirans fyrir lífsgæði Íslendinga (The importance of the power and utilities sector for the standard of living in Iceland).



All citizens have access to electricity in their homes and prices to the public are low by international comparison, especially the price of energy for indoor heating. Equalising energy prices to households has been emphasised by the government for quite some time. Household energy costs are higher for those who lack access to geothermal utilities for indoor heating or inhabit sparsely populated areas where the distribution cost of electricity is higher than in urban areas. The difference has been partially bridged with public subsidies. Various local authorities in regions without geothermal sources are conducting geothermal exploration for space heating. The experience of recent years gives certain cause for optimism that geothermal heating will increase compared with electricity, with subsequent savings.



### Increased energy efficiency

Due to technological advances, annual average electricity consumption by households has decreased from 4.9 MWh in 2009 to 4.37 MWh in 2017.<sup>63</sup> The figures are taken from the electricity forecast of the Energy Forecasting Committee, which predicts that energy consumption per household will decrease to 4 MWh in the coming years. More efficient lighting and household appliances are the main reasons for the decrease in household electricity consumption. On the other hand, the number of household appliances has been increasing, but most new types of appliances are energy efficient. Energy consumption per US dollar of GDP is high in Iceland, partly due to the high proportion of energy production in Iceland used by the power-intensive industry (80%), and partly to the small size of the population.<sup>64</sup> The authorities have taken measures to encourage increased energy efficiency, for example through the activities of the Energy Agency (Orkusetur), which advises the public on energy transition.

### International actions

The Icelandic government is a leader in the field of geothermal utilisation for heating and electricity production. The United Nations University Geothermal Training (GRT) Programme, which provides technical expertise to professionals in developing countries, is an important part of Iceland's contribution to international cooperation on sustainable energy. Iceland also contributes to a number of organisations and funds involved in various ways with energy projects in poorer countries. Iceland's support for the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) is an example of that. Since this collaboration began the World Bank's geothermal investments have increased substantially. In connection with its collaboration with ESMAP, Iceland also provides support in the form of technical consultancy to other World Bank's geothermal projects. Iceland also has extensive knowledge and experience of hydropower development which has contributed to international projects in that field, including participation in ESMAPs hydropower development facility.



<sup>63</sup> National Energy Authority, Energy Forecasting Committee, August 2018, Energy Forecast 2018–2050. Recalculation of the 2015 forecast based on new data and altered assumptions.

<sup>64</sup> National Energy Authority, Energy Forecasting Committee, August 2018, Energy Forecast 2018–2050. Recalculation of the 2015 forecast based on new data and altered assumptions.

Another example of Iceland's contribution to SDG7 is support to Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Iceland also takes part in bilateral cooperation in the field of renewable energy with East African states. By virtue of its expertise and extensive experience in the utilisation of renewable energy, Iceland has an international impact far exceeding the size of the country and its people.

Iceland has given special attention to integrating gender perspectives in environmental and climate issues in recent years and is committed to supporting specific measures to promote the position of women in this field. The Icelandic government has especially supported the SEforALL's People-Centred Accelerator platform, which is intended to promote gender equality and emphasises the social participation and promotion of women in the energy sector globally. The National Power Company (Landsvirkjun), Reykjavik Energy and the UNU Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme have participated in creating this platform.

Iceland also supports a project led by the UN Environment office in Nairobi, Kenya, aimed at mobilising African women and networks of entrepreneurs in the field of sustainable energy (Africa Women Energy Entrepreneur Framework, AWEEF).

SDG target 7.1 and 7.2



There are major opportunities for reducing emissions from transport in Iceland by utilising renewable electricity.

## Energy transition in transport

One of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in Iceland is road transport. In this sparsely populated country, the use of private automobiles has been extensive and ever-increasing, resulting in emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants. This means that there are major opportunities for reducing emissions from transport by utilising renewable electricity.





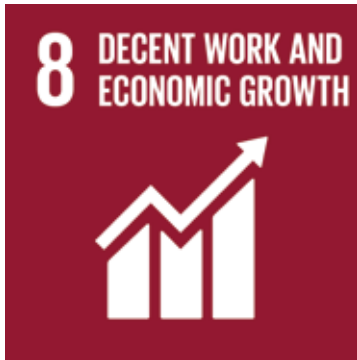
The Icelandic government has devoted concerted efforts to increase the share of renewable fuel and accelerate the increase in electric cars in the country's automobile fleet. In 2011, a carbon tax was imposed on fossil fuels, import duties on electric and hybrid cars have been cancelled and electric cars are exempt from VAT up to a certain amount. Infrastructure development has been undertaken in tandem with this. The state has subsidised the construction of charging stations in many parts of the country, and in 2018 construction regulations were amended so that connections for electric cars are now to be included in all new buildings and in renewals of commercial premises.

This has resulted in an increase in electric cars, as government support has been crucial in paving the way for new technology.

The trend is clear: in 2017, 13% of newly registered autos were electric, in 2018 the figure was 18%, and in the first two months of 2019 the proportion was 23%. The Climate Action Plan and plan for energy transition ensure that incentives will continue to be offered in order to ensure electric cars are cost-effective for Icelandic households. Carbon taxes will be raised in the coming years and infrastructure will be further strengthened. A strategy has been adopted to prohibit new registrations of diesel and petrol cars after 2030. This, together with the increased selection of electric cars, will accelerate the development, and electrification of automobiles is a key action for Iceland to meet the obligations of the Paris Agreement.







# Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

In many parts of the world, having secure employment is not enough to avoid poverty. Sustainable growth is dependent on the nations of the world creating situations where people can do work for decent wages, which does not harm the environment. States also need to provide their workforce with job opportunities and appropriate working conditions. Economic growth is one measure of the health

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Reduce long-term unemployment**
- **Increase support options for people with limited work capacity**
- **Increase productivity in harmony with the environment and the community**
- **Equal opportunities and equal wages for the same work**

of the economy and is considered important for a country's development. In Iceland, economic growth has been positive for the past eight years, after a contraction in the first two years after the financial collapse (2009-10).<sup>65</sup> Unemployment in Iceland increased considerably in 2009 after the collapse but has declined steadily since. However, an increase in unemployment over the previous year is now visible, as registered unemployment in March 2019 was 3.2%, compared to 2.4% in 2018.<sup>66</sup>

## Growth, business sectors and sustainability

It must be ensured that the dynamic economy in Iceland benefits all citizens. For this to happen, it is important that economic growth increase the prosperity of all Icelanders and that it is reflected

in fiscal policy: for instance, in the preparation of the government's fiscal strategy and financial planning and agreement between the state and local authorities. The strategy is based on five core values: sustainability, prudence, stability, consistency and transparency. Productivity is a key concept in the government's strategy, as is referred to in the policy of the Science and Technology Policy Council. Emphasis is placed on innovation and increased productivity in all sectors. The government has set a target for investment in research and development of three per cent of GDP by 2024. In Iceland, increased productivity in business and industry has been achieved through diversification, technological advances and innovation. Although Iceland, like most of the Western world since 2008, has witnessed low productivity growth, in recent years productivity has grown strongly and according to Statistics Iceland's forecast this growth is expected to continue for the next few years.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Statistics Iceland, [statice.is](http://statice.is).

<sup>66</sup> Directorate of Labour, March 2019, Vinnumarkaðurinn á Íslandi: Yfirlit, horfur og þjónusta Vinnumálastofnunar (The Labour Market in Iceland: Overview, outlook and service of the Directorate of Labour).

<sup>67</sup> Statistics Iceland, 1 June 2018, Þjóðhagsspá að sumri 2018 (Economic forecast in summer of 2018).

*“I think it’s very unfair that men have better possibilities for higher wages than women. It just isn’t okay for men to be able to get paid more than women with the same education or in the same job. I’m going to break that glass ceiling!”*

**Helena Dís Ingólfssdóttir**, 13 years old

Iceland’s policy in fisheries and agriculture is to further increase the utilisation of inputs in a sustainable manner. Iceland has been a leader in this development. Sustainability is a key aspect in utilisation of Iceland’s natural resources, to ensure they are not depleted. As a result, the link between economic growth and resource depletion has already been severed. Tourism in Iceland has grown rapidly. The government’s fiscal strategy emphasises energy saving and energy transition, which should help to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism industry and improve environmental conditions. In addition, sustainability indicators have been defined that will be used to make an assessment of tourism’s impact on the economy, environment, infrastructure and society to establish Iceland’s overall tourism carrying capacity. Work is underway on developing a tourism policy until 2030, with sustainability as its guiding principle.

### **Employment participation rate**

Labour market participation is regarded as one of the most important ways of preventing social exclusion and poverty. It is important, therefore, that as many people as possible are active in the labour market, regardless of a disability or restricted work capacity, as being active in the community, including the labour market, also contributes to better quality of life. The Icelandic government therefore emphasises preventing individuals’ prolonged absence from the labour market, reducing the risk of their persistent inactivity and possible disability. This implies preventing long-term unemployment of individuals regardless of their nationality, education or age. The Directorate of Labour is expected to provide effective counselling to place people in a suitable job, study or vocational training programme before they have exhausted their entitlement in the unemployment insurance system.

Emphasis is placed on increasing services for jobseekers with disabilities, those with restricted work capacity or disadvantaged persons. The employment rate of people with disabilities is generally less than others, and people with disabilities find it more difficult than others to get jobs. The government aims to enable as many people as possible to be active in the labour market. To do so, it is important to provide active labour market solutions to facilitate labour market access for people with restricted work capacity, including disabled people. Furthermore, it is the policy of the Icelandic government that in Iceland the same wages should be paid for work of equal value, regardless of gender. Legislation has been adopted providing for equal pay certification.



## Vulnerable groups

Iceland has ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, the Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, and the Convention Concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour. Iceland also has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In March 2019 the Icelandic governments Emphases in Actions to Combat Human Trafficking and Other Forms of Exploitation were published. They provide for child protection authorities to establish an effective and clear procedure for identifying children suspected to be victims of trafficking and that guidelines and procedures be drafted for professionals working with children if a child is suspected of being a victim of trafficking.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Iceland has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which includes strong emphasis on securing people with disabilities opportunities on the labour market equal to others and the duty of states to take appropriate measures in that regard.



Icelandic authorities undertake to ensure a safe and healthy working environment in line with social and technical developments in the community. Emphasis is placed on having workplaces carry out a risk assessment and a plan for health and safety in the workplace. In this context, prevention at the workplace is very important. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on ensuring that conditions exist so that health and safety issues can be resolved in the workplace itself, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Strong trade unions operate in Iceland which safeguard the interests of their members regarding labour market rights; the vast majority of workers in the domestic labour market are union members.<sup>69</sup> According to a report from Statistics Iceland, immigrants generally received almost eight per cent lower wages than native Icelanders in 2008-2017, after taking into account gender, age, education, family situation, residence and various occupational factors.<sup>70</sup> Adjusting for these factors gives a clearer picture of the effect workers' background has on their wages.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial revolution and the impact on the labour market

The debate about the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution has intensified all over the world in recent years. Governments are trying to understand the nature and extent of the rapid technological change that is happening and assess their positive and negative impact, and how to manage them for the benefit of global communities. The Icelandic authorities are aware of the developments that are taking place and the Prime Minister has, among other things, appointed a Future Committee that is addressing the challenges and opportunities for technological changes. The committee is composed of members of the parliament. The Science and Technology Policy Council has been examining major societal challenges facing Iceland, in addition to that the Prime Minister commissioned a report on the opportunities and challenges of Iceland for regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution.

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Justice, March 2019, Government Emphases in Actions Against Human Trafficking and Other Types of Exploitation.

<sup>69</sup> Statistics Iceland, 3 September 2015, Aðild að stéttarfélögum 2014 (Union membership in 2014).

<sup>70</sup> Statistics Iceland, 29 March 2019, Innflytjendur með um 8% lægri laun en innlendir (Immigrants have almost 8% lower wages than natives), [statice.is](http://statice.is).



The report on Iceland and the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution shows that significant changes in the labour market are foreseen. With increased automation, some jobs will become unnecessary but new jobs will be created. The potential impact of automation in Iceland was examined based on the OECD methodology. These results show that in Iceland there is a high probability that about 28% of the Icelandic labour market will undergo significant changes or that jobs will disappear completely due to auto-mechanization. This is about 54,000 individuals in the labour market compared to 2017 and is similar to that of the estimated impact of technological progress elsewhere in the Nordic countries. It is also predicted that 58% of jobs (just over 113,000 individuals) will change considerably due to the impact of technology, but only 14% of jobs (just under 27,000) will change a little. Based on this forecast, it is also possible to identify groups in the community that are likely to be affected to a varying degree by these changes in the future, e.g. based on education, gender, age, residence and citizenship.



### **International actions**

The United Nations University (UNU) trains young professionals from developing countries with a view to increasing diversification and introducing students to technological innovation in the fields of geothermal energy, fisheries and land restoration. In addition, the UNU Gender Equality Training Programme promotes an increased understanding of women's and children's issues, including trafficking in human beings and the slavery of women and children. Various development projects supported by Iceland are aimed at promoting education and keeping young people in school, for instance, in Malawi and Uganda. In cooperation with the World Bank, Iceland is working to strengthen the fisheries sector in western Africa. The intention is to increase cooperation with the Bank in the fisheries sector in the coming years. In eastern Africa, Iceland has for many years been engaged in research work on harnessing geothermal energy in collaboration with the Nordic Development Fund and the World Bank. The mapping of potential geothermal power development for electricity production will lay the foundation for increased economic growth and industrial diversity in the future.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs places increased emphasis on working with the business community in the field of development cooperation, placing special emphasis on utilising Icelandic expertise to combat poverty and hunger and promote sustainable development. In 2018, a new challenge fund was established for cooperation with the business community in connection with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The role of the fund is to encourage the participation and contribution of business and industry in international development cooperation with the aim of promoting job creation and sustainable growth in poor developing countries. Emphasis is also placed on possibilities for cooperation between civil society and companies on specific projects.



PHOTO BY BIRGIR ÍSLEIFUR GUNNARSSON.



The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, Bjarni Benediktsson, grants six companies and institutions a recognition for successfully implementing the Equal Pay Certification.

## Equal Pay Certification

Despite the fact that Iceland is ahead of many other states with regard to the situation and development of gender equality, this equality has not been achieved in all areas of society. This applies not least to the domestic labour market, as numerous surveys and studies show a persistent gender-based wage gap with women generally on the lower end.

Equal pay certification, which was enacted with the adoption of an Act which entered into force on 1 January 2018, is intended to ensure that basic human rights, legal obligation and international obligations are enforced and to prevent women and men from being paid different wages for the same or comparable work.

The Act obliges companies and institutions to implement the standard ÍST 85 (equal pay standard). This involves adopting an equal pay policy, setting a common benchmark, and carrying out a job classification analysis to allow for a realistic comparison of jobs so that they can be classified by value and the same or equivalent jobs assessed for equal pay. Finally, job classification and the payroll system are linked together.

Work is underway on the introduction of equal pay certification as provided for in the Act in four stages, depending on the number of employees of an enterprise or institution. To begin with, the largest and most populous institutions and enterprises have to complete equal pay certification, while in the final phase the smallest companies covered by the law, i.e. those with 25 or more employees, will complete the certification process. The introduction of equal pay certification is to be completed in full by the end of 2022.

The Act on Equal Pay Certification has attracted world attention, as Iceland is the first state to legislate a specific method and indicators to achieve the objectives of legislation on wage equality and there are indications that some states are interested in following the example of Iceland.





# Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Investments in infrastructure such as transport, irrigation, energy, IT and software are important to achieve the goals of sustainable development. The main objectives of strategic central and local government policies are directed to a large extent at making the country's infrastructure safe, reliable, sustainable and resilient. Infrastructure is a key to the country's competitiveness, both in terms of the competitiveness of the economy, the development of local communities and the general social well-being of citizens.

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Innovation in all industrial sectors** Iceland is one of Europe's most sparsely populated countries, with only 3.4 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> compared to an average of around 116 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in the European Union. Building and maintaining infrastructure is a challenging task because the cost is shared by relatively few and Icelandic weather makes considerable demands of infrastructure. The increased activity and pressure resulting from general economic growth and rapid rise in tourism in Iceland has had an impact on the operation, maintenance and development of infrastructure in most areas.
- **Increase scientific research**
- **Improve the infrastructure in transport and tourism**

## Infrastructure in Iceland

The infrastructure for research, development and innovation in Iceland is generally good. It provides support for promoting scientific activity and the exploitation of knowledge to the benefit of society and business and industry. Entrepreneurship is robust and good support is provided for such endeavours. However, efforts are needed to derive better results from entrepreneurship so that it will lead still more to the creation of new companies and the marketing of products in international competitive markets.

Major tasks await in developing the country's road network, not least in the capital area, after years of cutbacks following the financial collapse. The National Transport Plan 2019-2033 places considerable emphasis on new construction and maintenance, both as a result of needs which have accumulated, as well as 40% increase in road traffic in a five years period, from 2014-2018. The same can be said of both airports and harbours, both of which have accumulated needs for maintenance and reconstruction. In the case of airports, priority will be given to improving airports in the basic network and reviewing arrangements for alternate airports for the country's international traffic.





*“Without innovation there would be many more problems than there are in the world today. New ideas and inventions help us fight poverty and climate change and support human rights. Let’s keep creating something new!”*

**Andrea Ösp Hanssen**, 13 years old

Cargo transport to and from Iceland is primarily by sea, while passenger transport is by air. The volume of cargo transport to and from the country has increased in tandem with strong increases in the number of tourists and the population. The number of international passengers has increased rapidly while domestic flight passengers have decreased in number. Domestically, most people travel by private car. The number of passengers travelling by bus has increased in the capital region, but due to increasing traffic the proportion of these travellers is unchanged.

Nearly all of the country’s inhabitants (99.98%) live within two kilometres of a year-round road and those who do not enjoy road connections throughout the year have access to public transport by air and ferry.

In 2017, Iceland topped the list of the International Telecommunication Union of states that have best contributed to the development of electronic communications infrastructure.<sup>71</sup> Active competition in the telecom and IT markets, investment and innovation characterise the top-ranked countries. A good economic situation, literacy and a high level of education also contribute to enabling the public to make use of ICT. Iceland’s goal, to have 99.9% access to 100Mb+ wired internet connections by year-end 2021, is ambitious by international comparison.



Broadband installations on market premises are nearing complete coverage. Furthermore, the aim is to complete the state-subsidised installation of fiber-optic cable to individuals and companies domiciled in non-urban areas in accordance with the ICT strategy. International fibre-optic connections are good and transmission capacity considerably exceeds demand. Nonetheless, work is underway to increase the number of connections to improve security, in part to strengthen competitiveness and meet increased demand from data centres.

The electricity transmission grid is solid and under constant development. Most Icelanders enjoy secure electricity and work is being done to further strengthen the network in peripheral areas. The goal is to have electricity generation and distribution meet the needs of the public and industry in terms of transmission capacity and security of supply, and to equalise the cost of transmission and distribution between regions, for example, as provided for in the Strategic Regional Plan for 2018-2024.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Transport and Local Government, 11 April 2018, Ísland í 1. sæti meðal þjóða heims í upplýsingatækni og fjarskiptum (Iceland ranked 1st among the world’s states in IT and telecommunications).

<sup>72</sup> Althingi, Stefnumótandi byggðaaáætlun 2018-2024 (Strategic Regional Plan 2018-2024), althingi.is.





## Sustainable infrastructure and industry

The Strategic Regional Plan for 2018-2024 aims at equalising opportunities for all Icelanders for employment and services, equalise living conditions and promote sustainable regional development throughout Iceland. Particular emphasis is placed on support for areas suffering from long-term population decline, unemployment and a lack of diversification in industry, as well as on measures that promote gender equality. Industrial infrastructure in Iceland practically without exception uses best available technology. All aspects of infrastructure, including manufacturing processes, are constantly evolving, taking international obligations into account.



## Industrial Development

Sustainable development is the foundation of government policy. In particular, it emphasises that business and industry in the country is based on sustainable utilisation of resources. The government's fiscal strategy focuses on sustainable productivity, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, monitoring of risk factors and green solutions for the environment. Research, development and innovation, which are the prerequisites for economic progress and social well-being, are clearly linked to sustainable development. The emphasis is on the knowledge industry and other knowledge sectors, and less on traditional energy-intensive industry. The contribution of the knowledge sector is growing rapidly, and creative industries can be taken as an example of this development. Another example is the growth in biotechnology, such as Iceland's biotechnology industry, which has emerged from the fertile soil of traditional industries such as fisheries.

## Corporate financial services

Access of enterprises to financial services is generally good. The supply of capital for initial investments in start-up companies is less than the demand, and the same applies to funding for business expansion. Since 1997 the state has operated the New Business Venture Fund, which is a primary investor. Marketing consultancy is provided by the public sector mainly through Promote Iceland and the country's embassies, while the Technology Development Fund supports small businesses and entrepreneurs who are taking their first steps in foreign markets.

## Scientific research

The policy of the Science and Technology Policy Council emphasises systematic development of infrastructure, with the main focus naturally on education, research and innovation. The guiding principle is to have R&D investment reach three per cent of GDP by 2024, to enable better adaptation to rapid societal changes and complex global challenges, such as climate change, food security and public health.



## International actions

Iceland's strengths which are of most benefit to developing countries in industrial development and strengthening of infrastructure are in the areas of fisheries and energy exploitation. Expertise in these areas is communicated, among other things, through the UNU Training Programmes in Iceland. These programmes are examples of basic institutions that transfer the best available knowledge in their specialist areas to Iceland's partners among developing countries. The aim of the UNU Geothermal Training Programme, which is hosted by the National Energy Authority, is to provide young professionals from developing countries specialised training in the research and utilisation of geothermal energy. The UNU Fisheries Training Programme is hosted by the Marine Research Institute. Its goal is to increase expertise in fishing and fisheries in developing countries.

SDG target 9.4



Technical solutions and innovation is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The CarbFix method is an example of such a solution.

## CarbFix: Innovation in combating climate change

One of the greatest challenges of our time is to take measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Clearly, in order to achieve effective results in this respect, technical solutions and innovation are needed. The CarbFix method is an example of such a solution. Since 2007, Reykjavík Energy and the University of Iceland, in collaboration with scientific institutions abroad, have worked on developing and testing the idea that carbon dioxide, released with geothermal fluids when they are utilised, can be mixed with water and pumped back into the ground from whence it



came. There, it is permanently stored in the form of mineral deposits. The project has been successful and the results were published in *Science*, one of the world's most respected scientific journals, in 2016. The method is now used to clean and store permanently underground about one-third of the carbon dioxide flowing through the turbines of the Hellisheiði power plant. Through this same process about 2/3 of the hydrogen sulphide is also captured.

In tandem with increasing the cleaning and reinjection work at Hellisheiði, the CarbFix group, in collaboration with the Swiss innovation company Climeworks, has also been working on capturing carbon dioxide directly from the atmosphere and permanently storing it as underground mineral deposits. Because the methods that have been developed to deposit the geothermal gases in substrata require large amounts of water and because plenty of suitable rock strata can be found on the ocean floor, researchers at CarbFix are now also focusing on carbon capture in the sub-sea floor.





## Reduce inequality within and among countries

In recent decades, major steps have been taken globally to reduce inequality and poverty. Considerable success has been achieved in this regard among the world's poorest countries although there is a long way to go yet. Income inequality has decreased between states but on the other hand has increased within them.

Between 2009 and 2016, however, the Gini coefficient indicated income inequality was

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Equalise the position of people regardless of origin, nationality, religion or non-religious convictions, disability, restricted work capacity, age, sexual orientation or gender identity**
- **Create opportunities and conditions for immigrants to become active participants in Icelandic society**
- **Refugee housing issues**

decreasing in Iceland as it dropped from 29.6% in 2009 to 24.1% year in 2016.<sup>73</sup> Consensus is growing that economic growth alone is not sufficient to reduce poverty, but that governments need to ensure that growth results in benefit for everyone .

### Increase income of lowest earners

There is no official reference for low income in Iceland. Local authorities provide financial assistance to support individuals and families on the basis of the Act on Social Services of Local Authorities, but no criteria are set as to their minimum requirements in the Act. The social partners negotiate collective agreements for wage earners in wage negotiations, which set minimum terms for all employees in the sector concerned and regions covered by the agreements regardless of their gender, nationality or contract

period. Contracts cannot be concluded for poorer terms than are provided for in the collective agreements. In general, benefits and other public basic living support are expected to be no higher than the minimum wage.

Disability and rehabilitation pensions as well as related payments are intended to support persons with restricted work capacity and income below a certain reference level. The objective is to enable persons in such situations to lead independent lives. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on structuring these systems to support people in actively participating in society, including in employment. Social security old-age pensions are income-tested and pension rights begin at 67 years of age. Seniors' main pension payments come from occupational pension funds, based on their employment, and to which they have contributed from their wages during their working lives.



<sup>73</sup> Eurostat - Data Explorer, 11 June 2018, Gini coefficient of equalised disposable income - EU-SILC survey.

“Because people think that we don’t understand much, like you know, some unhandicapped people don’t listen to you. You know, no one listens to us very much. Except our mom and dad, they really always listen to us.”

**Disabled child**, 13-18 years old

(From the report *Expert Group of Disabled Children: Summary of Discussions*, issued in May 2019 by Children’s Ombudsman)

## Participation of all citizens in social, economic and political affairs

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men includes a general prohibition against discrimination based on gender. In 2018 two acts were adopted prohibiting all discrimination. They provide for equal treatment of individuals regardless of race, nationality, religion or non-religious conviction, disability, restricted work capacity, age, sexual orientation or gender identity. The legislation complies with the substance of Directives 2000/78/EC, on equal treatment in employment and occupation, and 2000/43/EC, on equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. The adoption of the acts marks a major step towards active involvement of as many people as possible in the labour market and other areas of society.



## Equal opportunities guaranteed and inequality reduced

In recent years, various acts have been amended with the aim of reducing inequality and ensuring equal opportunity. As an example, amendments were passed to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, Act on Services for Disabled People in Need of Long-term Support and the Act on Facilities, Hygiene and Safety in the Workplace. Mention could also be made of amendments to simplify the system of social security benefits, change the pension age and more. A current parliamentary resolution provides for action plans with policies and actions to assist individuals at a disadvantage in receiving equal treatment and enjoying equal status. Examples of such are the Action Plans for Gender Equality 2016-2019,<sup>74</sup> for the Disabled 2017-2021<sup>75</sup> and on Immigrants’ Issues 2016-2019.<sup>76</sup>



The new Act on Public Finances sets out values which imply that sustainability, prudence, stability, consistency and transparency shall always be the guiding principles. A specific provision concerns gender-responsive budgeting, which is also to be taken into account in drafting the budget bill. Ever more emphasis is placed on countering and reducing discrimination based on gender, disability or other factors in all government policy making and planning.



In May 2017, a strategy and Action Plan for the Disabled 2017–2021 was approved.<sup>77</sup> The plan identifies 40 projects in seven areas concerning accessibility, employment,

<sup>74</sup> Althingi, 145th Legislative Assembly 2015-2016, Draft parliamentary resolution on an Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2016-2019.

<sup>75</sup> Althingi, 146th Legislative Assembly 2016-2017, Draft parliamentary resolution on an Action Plan for the Disabled for 2017-2021.

<sup>76</sup> Althingi, 145th Legislative Assembly 2015-2016, Draft parliamentary resolution on an Action Plan on Immigrants’ Issues for the years 2016-2019.

<sup>77</sup> Althingi, 146th Legislative Assembly 2016-2017, Draft parliamentary resolution on an Action Plan for the Disabled for 2017-2021.

health, image and instruction, education, independent life and development of services. Work has begun on about 19 actions, which are either in the preparation stage, underway or complete. The actions include many challenges, including equalising the accessibility of disabled people to society, increasing employment participation and promoting a positive attitude to issues concerning disabled people.

## **International financial markets and institutions**

Based on the Agreement on a European Economic Area (EEA Agreement), a large amount of EU legislation on financial market supervision has been transposed into Icelandic law and this process will continue in coming years. The aim is to have the legislative framework in Iceland reflect that of the EU as closely as possible while taking the country's circumstances into consideration where appropriate. The small size of the public administration in this country means that Iceland is often the last EEA country to transpose these acts. There was a significant backlog on the transposition of European financial market rules for a number of years, while an arrangement was sought to provide for pan-European financial market regulators that would comply with the Icelandic constitution. Significant forward progress was achieved in 2017 with the adoption of the Act on a European System for Financial Market Supervision, which gives EU regulations on supervision of the EU single market the force of law in Iceland. Increased funding has also been provided to reduce the backlog in transposing EU legislation by public administration with the hiring of additional specialists.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessed the compliance of the Icelandic Financial Supervisory Authority (FME) with the 29 core principles of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision year in 2014. In the IMF's assessment the minimum criteria were satisfied for 7 of the 29 principles, making it clear that there is considerable scope for improvement. Since that time, considerable changes have been made to the regulatory framework of the financial market and FME's activities. The merging of the Central Bank of Iceland and the FME is currently underway. This will create a single institution responsible for monetary policy, financial stability and financial market supervision. The merger was decided, in part, based on proposals by domestic and foreign experts pointing out substantial opportunities for synergies, cost-cutting and better oversight.

The government has taken some steps to reduce the cost of financial services. The government's fiscal strategy states that the intention is to reduce the special bank tax from 0.376% to 0.145% during the period. A bill to reduce premiums for deposit insurance paid to the Depositors 'and Investors' Guarantee Fund by 30% has been placed in the government's online consultation process. These measures should lead to lower costs for banking customers.



## Safe migration

The proportion of immigrants in Iceland has never been higher than in 2018 when it was 12.6% of the population and thus similar to that of other Nordic countries.<sup>78</sup> An Action Plan on Immigrants' Issues was adopted in September 2016 and will apply to the end of 2019.<sup>79</sup> The plan rests on five pillars: the community, family, education, the labour market and refugees. The plan includes 30 actions, all of which are to promote equal opportunities for all residents, regardless of individual factors and circumstances. Implementation of 19 actions is underway, four are completed.

The main challenge is to create opportunities and circumstances for immigrants to be actively involved in Icelandic society. International organisations have called refugees one of the biggest challenges that the world faces today, and Iceland is no exception here. The main challenge concerning refugees is to provide accommodation.



## International actions

Gender equality and the rights of children and other vulnerable groups are at the forefront of Iceland's international development cooperation. Particular attention should be paid to those groups who are deprived of their rights, such as LGBT people, disabled people and others who are disadvantaged.

The main objective of Iceland's international development cooperation is to reduce inequalities between and within countries. Iceland therefore directs a large part of its contributions to the poorest countries, with an emphasis on supporting those groups that are suffering from poverty and inequality. This includes, in particular, support for the development of social infrastructure, not least in rural areas, where poverty is greatest. In addition, Icelandic international development cooperation places emphasis on supporting sustainable use of natural resources with non-discrimination and equality as guiding principles.

Recently, Iceland held the Vice-Chairmanship of the UN Commission for Social Development and led negotiations on the main theme of the Commission's annual general meeting, which focused on possible ways of reducing inequality. Iceland's Standing Committee has also actively participated in a review of the work of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), including by directing negotiations on reform of the Council last year and working in committees discussing reforms.



<sup>78</sup> Statistics Iceland, 5 December 2018, Innflytjendum heldur áfram að fjölga (Immigrant numbers continue to increase).

<sup>79</sup> Althingi, 145th Legislative Assembly 2015-2016, Draft parliamentary resolution on an action plan on Immigrants' Issues for the years 2016-2019.





The sports and recreation grants are intended to increase equality in the local community as well as to promote diversity in sports, arts and leisure activities.

## Local authorities' sports and recreation grants

Since 2000, a growing number of local authorities has offered grants to pay for participation of children in constructive leisure activities regardless of their economic or social situation. The grants are intended to increase equality in the local community, strengthen the social environment and positively impact children's development, as well as to promote diversity in sports, arts and leisure activities. This is not a mandatory obligation for local authorities, although most indications suggest that the majority of the population considers such grants to be a natural right of the residents. The great majority of parents or guardians, around 85%, make use of the grants where they are available.

In recent years, the development of this unique funding system has been rapid, and it is now rare for a local authority not to provide some sort of support for constructive sports and leisure activities to 6-16 years old children. Freedom of choice has likewise increased substantially, and users in the largest municipalities can use the grant practically as they like for sports, art or other leisure activities. The disposition of the grant is simply reported in the local authorities' web portal. The age limits have also been widening, and in some cases the range is from 5-18 years. Common grant amounts range from ISK 35-50 thousand and in many cases payment can be split between more than one recipient.

The grants are commonly used for sports and/or music studies. However, diversity is growing, and it will be interesting to see how this will develop in the coming years. Research strongly suggests that the grants are achieving their desired purpose, not least with regard to children who are vulnerable, e.g. due to the parents' nationality or poverty.



# Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Urbanisation in Iceland has been rapid and the development of sustainable cities and towns is becoming increasingly important. Centres of dense population can create conditions where new jobs are created and prosperity increases. To maintain such conditions, without damaging the environment and natural resources, presents many challenges. Common problems associated with

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Sustainable urban development that ensures acceptable residential conditions**
- **Challenges for rural areas, such as communications and public transport**
- **Supply of housing suitable for people with low income and assets**

urban areas include insufficient funding to provide basic services, lack of adequate housing and declining infrastructure. The objective of sustainable cities and communities therefore emphasises that all urban dwellers have equal access to basic services, a healthy environment, energy, housing and transport.

Iceland is a very sparsely populated country, with around three people per km<sup>2</sup>. In spite of this, the great majority of Icelanders, around 94%, live in towns and cities.<sup>80</sup> At the beginning of 2016, there were 60 population centres in the country with 200 or more inhabitants, according to Statistics Iceland. Over 60% of the population live in the capital region.

## Sustainable cities and urban development

Among the main challenges facing the government is to manage the social, environmental and economic development of cities and towns. Sustainable urban development is based on a comprehensive vision and includes actions and integrated solutions for planning and infrastructure development that ensure increased sustainability and acceptable living conditions.

Sustainable transport solutions and climate-friendly transport are an important part of city and town development. Green areas in cities, parks, nearby outdoor areas and resilient ecosystems improve air quality and are prerequisites for climate adaptation and quality of life. Noise levels in urban areas need to be kept within acceptable limits. Focusing on sustainable cities and communities in all planning work and implementation can help solve urban climate and environmental problems.

Specific attention needs to be directed at ensuring the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities to live and work in an inclusive way, giving them realistic possibilities for an independent and normal life.



<sup>80</sup> Statistics Iceland, March 20, 2017, Landsmönnum fjölga um 1,8% (Icelanders increase by 1.8%).

*“I think we can have good affects on the city we live in by using buses more often, planting more trees and having enough housing for everyone.”*

**Roman Chudov**, 15 years old

## **Housing and public transport**

An increased supply of affordable rental housing is needed, and efforts are underway to increase the number of such homes, based on legislation in 2016 on subsidised housing. In 2014 housing expenses as a proportion of renters' disposable income was around 24.3%, and the proportion of tenants who had to bear onerous housing costs was 18.7%, according to figures from Statistics Iceland.<sup>81</sup> Also, the average waiting time for social rental housing on a countrywide basis was 26.6 months in 2015.<sup>82</sup>

At the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, a task force looked at ways to increase the supply of apartments and other actions to improve the housing market situation. The group submitted 40 proposals to the Prime Minister.<sup>83</sup> In the group's estimation, there was an unmet need for some five to eight thousand apartments in the country as a whole. Extensive construction of residential housing is, however, planned in the coming years, and it is estimated that around ten thousand apartments will be built in 2019-2021. If these estimates prove correct, the unmet need for housing will be reduced considerably, but nonetheless some two thousand apartments will still be needed at the beginning of 2022.

Despite extensive construction, there are indications that the supply coming into the market is less suitable for people with low income and assets. A large proportion of smaller apartments that are being built in the capital area are in neighbourhoods where the price per m<sup>2</sup> is highest. In those municipalities in the capital area where the m<sup>2</sup> price is lower, it appears that most of the apartments built are larger, which as a result are less economical to purchase. It is therefore necessary to undertake measures to increase the availability of housing of modest size at moderate prices for both renters and buyers.

The number of passengers on public transport has increased in recent years, but remains fairly constant as a percentage of transport methods within the metropolitan area. The share of public transport is decreasing in other areas despite the reorganisation of the route network and improved integration of different modes of transport. A new Public transport agenda has been introduced with the intention to have all towns or villages with over 100 residents connected by public transport, including bus, ferry and air transport. A total of 95% of Icelanders are estimated to live within ten kilometres of a node in the network. All residents should be able to reach necessary public services in less than 3.5 hours.



<sup>81</sup> Ministry of Welfare, 25 August 2015, Um 5.000 leiguíbúðir í eigu sveitarfélaga (About 5,000 rental apartments owned by municipalities).

<sup>82</sup> Statistics Iceland, 12 November 2015, Byrði húsnæðiskostnaðar þyngst hjá leigjendum (The housing cost burden is greatest for tenants).

<sup>83</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 22 January 2019, Átakshópur leggur til 40 aðgerðir til að bregðast við vanda á húsnæðismarkaði (Task force suggests 40 measures to address housing market problems).



For the elderly and the disabled, special transport services are operated by local authorities. Children who live far from schools, travel by school bus. A study of whether there is a gender-related difference in use of the transport system is currently underway.

A draft public transport policy has been presented and is undergoing the public consultation process, together with an action plan. Its main priorities are:

- **To have flights, ferries and bus transport form an integrated whole.**
- **Increased service to passengers with integrated information systems covering all modes of transport.**
- **Co-ordinated service criteria for the network of all transport modes.**
- **Construction of a high-quality public transport system in the capital region.**

### **Air quality**

Air quality in Iceland is generally good, although some pollutants exceed defined threshold limits several times a year. The weather can be an influencing factor when pollutants exceed the limit. The main sources of particulate matter in urban areas are traffic (materials loosened from pavement, vehicle exhaust etc.), construction and airborne street dust. In addition, there is a high level of particulate pollution in the capital area at the turn of the year caused by fireworks. Outside urban areas sources of particulates include sand from wind erosion, volcanic eruptions (volcanic tephra/wind-blown ash) and airborne dust from gravel roads.

Several studies have been carried out on the potential health effects of air pollution in Iceland and many have shown a relationship between these factors. The studies have either been directed at anthropogenic air pollution (from traffic and geothermal power plants, particulates and other traffic-related pollutants) or natural aspects, i.e. volcanic activity (ash/particulate matter and sulphur dioxide).

In Iceland there are many options which can be utilised to improve air quality in the country, but in this context it is important to increase public consciousness of issues related to air quality. With increased knowledge about air quality individuals become more conscious of what sort of air pollution exists in Iceland, what can be done to limit it and its health effects. In November 2017 the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources published a plan on air quality: Clean Air for the Future - a plan for air quality in Iceland. Responsibility for the implementation of the plan rests with the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources which, in cooperation with various parties, is working on the detailed implementation of its elements. It is to review the objectives of the program every four years. The air quality plan is to be followed at all levels of government and should be a benchmark for policy formulation by those working in areas related to the emission and concentration of air pollutants. A steering committee oversees the implementation of the plan, checks regularly how actions carried out under the plan are progressing and informs the Minister of the situation.

## **Civil Protection and Emergency Management**

The aim of civil protection is to prepare, organise and implement measures aimed at preventing and limiting insofar as possible physical injury or damage to the health of the public and damage to the environment and property, due to natural disasters. The Civil Protection Act provides for co-ordinated system to monitor dangerous situations, for instance, due to disasters, emphasising prevention and risk analysis, and mitigating measures to reinforce resilience to shocks, a clear control system and lines of command to respond to dangerous situations and recovery actions in the wake of shocks.

## **To protect and ensure cultural and natural heritage**

Cultural and natural heritage are protected by law. The aim of the legislation is to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in its own environment, facilitate access to and provide public education on cultural heritage, and fund research on it. A draft strategy for these efforts for the next four years is currently under preparation. It has six principal objectives: to support heritage preservation, increase awareness of cultural heritage, conclude registration of cultural artefacts and sites, promote research on heritage, utilise heritage sustainably and reasonably to the benefit of the community and increase cooperation among Icelanders, both experts and the public, on heritage protection.

The aim of the Nature Conservation Act is to preserve for the future the diversity of Icelandic nature, including biodiversity and geodiversity, and the variety of its landscape. The Act is to ensure as far as possible the development of Icelandic nature on its own terms and to protect its unique or historical characteristics. The Act also contains provisions that promote the recovery of disrupted ecosystems and increase the resilience of Icelandic ecosystems to natural disasters and global changes to the natural environment. Furthermore, it aims to protect and ensure sustainable utilisation of resources and other natural qualities. The Act is also intended to direct the interaction of man with the environment so that it harms neither flora and fauna, land, air, sea or water. It aims at facilitating the nation's access to and knowledge of the country's nature and cultural heritage associated with it. The Act also ensures the public's right of access to the country and to enjoy nature, thereby promoting general outdoor activities in harmony with nature, for the health and well-being of Icelanders.

The objective of the Act regarding a National Plan for the development of infrastructure to conserve the natural and cultural heritage is to formulate and co-ordinate policies for the development, operation and maintenance of infrastructure, given the increase in visitor traffic to the country's leading sites of natural beauty and cultural significance. On the one hand, this applies to physical infrastructure, which can increase the resilience of the location in question to increased tourist traffic. On the other hand, intangible infrastructure, including rules on treatment of the areas and supervision, is aimed primarily at protecting the location against increased encroachment without permanently altering its appearance. The National





Plan consists of a 12-year strategic National Plan and a three-year project plan, the implementation of which commenced in 2018.

## Strategic Regional Plan

The government's Strategic Regional Plan aims at promoting positive economic, social and environmental relations between urban areas, suburban towns and rural regions. Regional plans of action define regional emphases of the Plan, taking into account other state programmes. They set out the long-term strategy and future vision of each region. Regional plans of action are intended to create increased consistency and professionalism in regional development planning. The arrangement enables better utilisation of funding and moves decision-making closer to the local residents, who know the circumstances best. The basic theme with regard to Iceland is whether regional policy reduces the isolation of specific groups in the community and to maintain a balance between urban and rural development, e.g. with regard to development of infrastructure and services.



SDG target **11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.4, 11.6, 11.7, 11.A** and more



From the municipality of Kópavogur.

## Implementation of municipalities - Kópavogur and Mosfellsbær

Municipalities in Iceland follow different approaches to the implementation of the SDGs, usually either an overall approach or a more limited implementation in specific areas. In addition, there are examples of regional approaches, with the cooperation of several municipalities in regional planning, and project-based approaches, such as the introduction of energy transition actions and health promotion.

Kópavogur is Iceland's second largest municipality and has integrated the SDGs into the municipality's overall policy. In selecting priority targets for its local strategy the municipality of Kópavogur considered three factors: the Icelandic government's priority targets, the position of the United Cities for

Local Government as to what targets fit well with the municipality's tasks, and finally the projects which the municipality of Kópavogur is committed to, such as the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Included in this framework, the priority targets for the municipal council, and therefore the main targets for the municipality's overall policy, are 34 in number.<sup>84</sup>

In connection with formulating the municipality's policy, it has been decided to implement measurements of the municipality's activities according to the ISO 37120 standard, which has been linked to the SDGs. This is a recent standard, the first standard in the world to measure the services of local authorities.<sup>85</sup> To analyse the external environment in the municipality's policy formulation process, it was decided to use the Social Progress Index, which has been linked to the SDGs.

Kópavogur is one of nine cities and regions in the world which have been chosen for a pilot project by the OECD in implementing the SDGs.<sup>86</sup>

The municipality of Mosfellsbær has integrated the goals into its environmental policy. In this process, residents were mobilised to participate in a community meeting to set targets and prioritise projects. The result was then linked to the SDGs. Among the goals is to have municipality develop in a sustainable and progressive way, with nature conservation and increased welfare of its residence as guiding principles. The goals will be achieved through action in ten areas, all linked to one or more SDGs, such as environmental education, sustainable transport and waste management.



From the municipality of Mosfellsbær.

<sup>84</sup> Kópavogur, [kopavogur.is/sdg](http://kopavogur.is/sdg).

<sup>85</sup> World Council on City Data, 2018, WCCD City Data for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, [dataforcities.org](http://dataforcities.org).

<sup>86</sup> OECD, A Territorial Approach to the SDGs, [oecd.org](http://oecd.org).





## Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Responsible consumption and production imply to the sustainable and efficient use of natural resources and energy, public access to basic services and green jobs and better quality of life for all. The implementation of the goal helps to reduce economic, environmental and social costs in the future, strengthen competitiveness and reduce poverty.

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Decrease consumption and implement circular economy**
- **Tourism in harmony with the environment and the community**

Iceland faces considerable challenges to achieve the goals on sustainable consumption and production. Utilisation of natural resources, for example for energy production, fishing, tourism, agriculture and various industries, is the foundation of the Icelandic economy. Ensuring sustainable and efficient utilisation of resources and that this does not exceed what nature can bear is thus of major importance. Various methods have been developed to identify sustainability; the Global Footprint Network, for instance, has presented methods to calculate the ecological footprint of states.<sup>87</sup> According to its findings, it is clear that Iceland has its work cut out for it to reduce this footprint.

### Sustainable consumption and production and efficient use of resources

The Icelandic authorities have not put forward any special programme for sustainable consumption and production but increasing emphasis is placed on improving the use and treatment of the country's natural resources. During Iceland's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019, a roadmap is being prepared, aimed at supporting small communities in the Nordic countries in planning for sustainable consumption and production. Iceland's fisheries management system is an example of extremely efficient use of the resources, as fishing has through the centuries been the cornerstone of the Icelandic economy and its food production. The fisheries management system is based on extensive research on fish stocks and marine ecosystems. Many commercial stocks in Icelandic waters have been certified according to standards that accord with international conventions on sustainability in fisheries.

The Icelandic government's strategy "Combating Waste Together" sets out Iceland's policy on preventive action against waste for the period 2016–2027. The policy focuses on nine categories, six of which have designated targets: food, plastics, textiles,

<sup>87</sup> Global Footprint Network, footprintnetwork.org.

*“Don’t just use something once, use it more than once and if something is broken, do your best to fix it, don’t just throw it away.”*

**Bo Guttormsdóttir-Frost**, 10 years old

electrical appliances, green buildings and paper. It also provides for longer-term actions on by-products from meat and fish processing, beverage packaging and reducing waste from power-intensive industry. An appendix to the policy sets out indicators and targets for plastics, textiles, by-products from meat and fish processing, beverage packaging and aluminium and metallurgical grade silicon production. The policy is under review and circular economy is taken into account.

Since 2009 the government has followed a policy prioritising eco-friendly public procurement. The policy was updated in 2013 and is valid until the end of 2016. A new Public Procurement Act came into force in 2016. It provided increased authorisation to take environmental protection, sustainability, social goals and innovation into account in public procurement. In line with new emphases, work is underway on issuing a new procurement policy for the state, where increased emphasis is placed on sustainable procurement and a clear policy for the future.

## **Waste prevention and chemical use**

One objective of the waste prevention policy is to reduce food waste, in part to improve utilisation of resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The results of the first study of food waste in Iceland were published in 2016 and showed that food waste in Iceland was similar to that of other European countries.<sup>88</sup> Following the projects to counter food waste which have been launched in Iceland, targets and indicators will be developed aimed at reducing per capita food waste by a specific amount (kg per resident) within a specified period.

According to Statistics Iceland, Iceland has achieved the targets of EU waste disposal legislation except with regard to glass, wood and organic waste. In 2015 nearly 78% of total waste was recycled or otherwise re-used and almost 88% of chemical waste was recycled while just over 12% was incinerated or disposed as landfill. More than 99% of mixed household waste was buried or incinerated without energy recovery.<sup>89</sup> Specific polluting enterprises are required to keep and submit green accounts.

Sound chemical and waste management is a prerequisite for health protection and to ensure sustainable production and thus sustainable consumption. Chemical legislation in Iceland is comparable to that of the EU, and Iceland is a party to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. Iceland is also a party to the Minimata Convention on Mercury, the Chemical

<sup>88</sup> Environment Agency, November 2016, Food Waste in Iceland - Methodological report.

<sup>89</sup> Statistics Iceland, [static.is](http://static.is).



Weapons Convention, the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the part of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) concerning persistent organic pollutants. Provisions of most of the above agreements are adopted through Iceland's membership of the EEA Agreement. The BAN Amendment to the Basel Convention has also been ratified. Ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol is also in progress.

### **Increased sustainability in the travel industry**

The development of tourism in Iceland has been very rapid over the past ten years, and the sector has now become a main contributor to the nation's foreign currency earnings. The rapid growth has brought various challenges, not least in ensuring continued value creation while protecting the environment and resources, as Iceland's nature is one of the main premises for the travel industry to flourish in Iceland. In light of this, the government's actions in recent years have aimed, among other things, at protecting nature through improved infrastructure at tourist destinations, endeavouring to spread tourist traffic around the country and throughout the year, increasing safety and promoting responsible travel behaviour.

Various governmental projects aim to improve the organisation and management of travel services. Efforts have been made to increase research on the development and impact of tourism, including on the environment and society. In addition, over 60 indicators have now been defined that will be used to make an assessment of pressure on the natural environment, infrastructure and community from the numbers of tourists in the country. At the same time, work is underway to formulate guiding principles for the sector in the future. Both will serve as the basis for a review of long-term policy for the sustainable development of the sector.

### **Companies focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability**

Many enterprises in Iceland have adopted CSR policies and publish sustainability reports annually. This is in line with the Act on Annual Financial Statements, which places an obligation on large enterprises and entities connected with public interests to publish non-financial information. A number of companies in Iceland have chosen to be guided by the sustainability criteria of the UN Global Compact<sup>90</sup>, in addition to which a growing number of enterprises use international benchmarks for social responsibility such as the Global Reporting Initiative<sup>91</sup> or ESG disclosure of environmental and social practices, as well as governance<sup>92</sup>. New legislation in 2017, requiring the use of ethical criteria for pension funds investment, has provided a basis for increased emphasis on responsible and sustainable investment.

<sup>90</sup> UNGlobal Compact, [unglobalcompact.org](http://unglobalcompact.org).

<sup>91</sup> Global Reporting Initiative, [globalreporting.org](http://globalreporting.org).

<sup>92</sup> Nasdaq Iceland, [nasdaqiceland.tumblr.com](http://nasdaqiceland.tumblr.com).

## International actions

As stated above, Iceland participates in a wide variety of international collaboration on chemical and waste agreements. Internationally, Iceland has also participated in recommending reforms for harmful government subsidies for fossil fuels, including through a joint ministerial declaration to the 11th WTO ministerial meeting in Buenos Aires. Iceland also actively participates in Nordic cooperation in the area of responsible consumption and production, and has, among other things, initiated a Nordic project and the formulation of a policy on the bioeconomy. Iceland also participates in the EU's cooperation on chemicals under the auspices of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), in addition to which all the UNU Training Programmes in Iceland aim to make production practices more sustainable, for example, by promoting sustainable land use and fisheries management.

SDG target **12.2**, **12.6** and more



The launch of the project *Responsible Tourism* in 2017 when representatives of companies signed a declaration to set themselves targets in responsible tourism, to measure them and to publish the results regularly.

## Responsible Tourism

There are many challenges for the travel industry that concern corporate social responsibility and sustainability. These include the increased pressure on natural resources, ensuring that employees' rights are respected, that the local communities visited by tourists get a fair share of the benefits and, not least, ensuring the safety of tourists. It was in consideration of this that FESTA, the Icelandic Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, and the Icelandic Travel Cluster decided at the beginning of 2017 to work together on encouraging responsible tourism based on measurable factors for



sustainability and social responsibility. The project is carried out in a broad collaboration between all the major stakeholders in the tourism industry, while the patron of the project is the President of Iceland.

The purpose of the project is to help Iceland be a sought-after destination for tourists in the future which supports sustainability for the nation's future generations.

The areas of emphasis are:

- Treat the land with consideration and respect nature.
- Ensure the safety of guests and treat them with courtesy.
- Respect the rights of employees.
- Have a positive impact on the community.



At the beginning of 2019, more than 350 companies had signed a declaration to set themselves targets in the above-mentioned areas of emphasis, to measure them and to publish the results regularly. The project has been followed up by education, seminars and regular events related to the subject.

Further development of the project is planned, with clearer connections to the SDGs. *Responsible Tourism* will connect with one of the projects under Iceland's Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which emphasises sustainable food tourism and extends over the period 2019-2021. The aim of this project is, among other things, to increase understanding and raise awareness of the importance of consumer behaviour and climate change as driving forces in the Nordic food tourism services and bridge the gap between the food producer and the traveller as consumer.





## Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Climate change and its impact upon nature and communities are one of the main challenges facing countries of the world. Among the many types of effects are changes in global temperatures, extreme weather events, melting of glaciers, increasing drought and rise in the sea level, which will foreseeably have the greatest impact on the world's poorest and most vulnerable inhabitants. The goal of climate

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Increases in temperature and effects on vegetation and the biota**
- **Ocean acidification and impact on marine biota**
- **Rising sea levels**

action measures is primarily to address these threats. They aim to strengthen countries' resilience and adaptability to respond to the consequences of climate change while at the same time making every effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Iceland is one of the nations releasing the most greenhouse gases per capita. The consequences of climate change in Iceland are most evident in the rapid melting of glaciers, but the acidification of the sea with associated changes in the marine ecosystem is also of great concern, as are forecasts of increased precipitation and landslides, more frequent volcanic eruptions due to crustal uplift and higher sea levels, to name just a few risk factors.

### The current situation and Iceland's international commitments

Iceland is a party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN FCCC), as well as the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. The UN FCCC is the principal forum for world states to reach agreements on global responses to climate change. The objective of the Paris Agreement is to prevent the Earth's temperature from increasing by more than 2°C and preferably not more than by 1.5°C from the average global temperature prior to industrialisation. Iceland is planning to participate in the common goal of EU states and Norway to reduce emissions by 40% from 1990 levels. More detailed targets for reducing Iceland's emissions are expected to be available in 2019. In January 2019, the Prime Minister also signed a statement with other Nordic prime ministers on joint actions on climate issues, which involves strengthening cooperation and working together for carbon neutrality.<sup>93</sup>

Greenhouse gas emissions in Iceland per person are high compared to many European countries, at around 15.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents per person in 2015. For the European Union, this figure was 8.7 tonnes per person per year,<sup>94</sup> while the global average

<sup>93</sup> The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, 25 January 2019, Stepping up Nordic climate co-operation, norden.org.

<sup>94</sup> Eurostat.



*“The environment is important.  
I don’t care to get an education if I can’t  
use it in a world that matters.”*

**Stefán Borgar Brynjólfsson**, 12 years old

was 6.5 tonnes per person per year.<sup>95</sup> Emissions in Iceland are greatest from industry and chemical use, followed by emissions from land transport, agriculture and fisheries. It is clear that in the coming years very extensive action is needed in this country to reduce emissions to ensure compliance with Iceland’s obligations under the UN FCCC. Unlike many other countries, emissions from energy production are low in Iceland and therefore there is scant scope for reducing emissions in the sector, since both electricity and heating come from renewable energy resources.

### **Challenges and actions**

The greatest potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is to replace fossil fuels used in land transport and fisheries. Furthermore, measures to reduce emissions from agriculture must be considered.

Green incentives and environmental taxes are now being used to nudge the development of Icelandic society towards a low-carbon economy. A carbon tax is collected on fossil fuels, for example, and public levies on eco-friendly cars (electric-, hydrogen- and methane-powered) have been eliminated while commodity taxes on automobiles reflect their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The development of infrastructure for electric cars is also subsidised by public funding. Emissions from heavy industry are covered by the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Under this programme emission allowances decrease each year, with the resulting reduction in emissions within the system. The government’s action plan sets out 34 actions aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, emphasising a contraction in transport and land use.

The Icelandic school system places considerable emphasis on education in sustainability, including on climate change. According to the National Curriculum Guide, sustainability is one of the six foundations of education in Iceland. Mention could also be made of the project by the Icelandic Environment Association Landvernd, Eco-Schools, which provides education in environmental issues and sustainability at all school levels. Participation in this voluntary project has been good. One-third of preschool pupils and half of the country’s compulsory and upper secondary school pupils have taken part. The country’s universities have a plentiful supply of programmes in environmental and sustainability studies. Iceland hosts four study programs under the auspices of the UNU Training Programmes (the Geothermal Training Programme, Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme,

<sup>95</sup> Eurostat, World Resources Institute, wri.org.

Land Restoration Training Programme and the Fisheries Training Programme) which all, directly and indirectly, address issues related to sustainability and climate change. A project presenting Icelandic glaciers as a living classroom emphasises, among other things, models for glacier disappearance, isostatic adjustment, uplift and more. Special emphasis is placed on making the findings visible and using them for education.

The awareness within the industries and companies are also rising, where many businesses calculate the business's carbon footprint and set their own GHG emission reduction target and use carbon uptake, such as revegetation and afforestation to carbon neutralise the emission related to operation of the business. Many businesses also have their own green transport policy, with companies' cars run on electricity or other alternative fuels and employees are encouraged to use public transport, bike or walk.

The government of Iceland has presented a bill of climate act that stipulates the ministries and public institutions as well as state owned companies to set a climate action plan for their operations, with clear emission reduction target and carbon neutralisation with revegetation and afforestation.

## **Adaptation and increased resilience**

It is evident that changes in the environment due to climate change, such as sea level rise and melting glaciers, will entail new challenges for planning and the built environment. The National Planning Policy for 2015-2026 discusses the importance of focusing on ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the planning process. At the same time, plans are to take into account the possible effects of natural disasters and climate change. The factors considered include changes in glacial rivers, rising sea levels, increased risk of flooding and drifting sand due to erosion.

Adjustment to climate change is about responses to climate change and reducing damage due to likely changes. The Icelandic Met Office is working on projects which include the co-ordination of research and monitoring of changes in the natural environment, preparation of scenarios of potential climate developments in Iceland, and an assessment of the need for adaptation due to consequences of climate change in the country, such as changes in sea levels, vegetation and glaciers. The project is carried out in collaboration with stakeholders. Information on the effects of and adaptation to climate changes are published, for instance in the report of the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources to the UN FCCC. Climate change can be expected to result in more instances of landslides and tidal floods. The Met Office has prepared a hazard assessment for avalanches and work on a hazard assessment for volcanic eruptions, water and ocean flooding is underway. Work is in progress in Government Offices to place the preparation of a hazard and risk assessment for natural disasters in Iceland in a formal process (cf. Act No 49/1997, on Defence against Avalanches and Landslides), with the intent of placing this under the auspices of the Disaster Fund (Hamfarasjóður).



## International actions

Iceland was among the first countries to ratify the Paris Agreement and accordingly will seek to achieve, with EU states and Norway, a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The Icelandic government's emphases in renewable energy and sustainable land use are reflected in part in its contributions to international cooperation through the UNU Training Programmes in Iceland and the Green Climate Fund. The Green Climate Fund has so far financed 193 projects in low- and middle-income countries and last year, 42 projects received support from the Fund. Iceland also contributes to the Least Developed Countries Fund under the UNFCCC that supports those countries to prepare and implement action plans for adapting to climate change. The Icelandic authorities also direct efforts to increasing the share of women from developing countries in international negotiations on climate change through the Women's Delegate Fund of the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO).



SDG target **13.2** and more



According to Reykjavik's climate policy the city plans to become carbon neutral by 2040 and by the same year, to have automobile traffic and public transport free from greenhouse gas emissions.

## City of Reykjavik in the forefront in climate change actions

As early as in the 1930s, Reykjavik placed itself among the world's most climate-friendly cities when it began work on heating buildings in Reykjavik with geothermal water instead of fossil fuels. The geothermal heating project marked the beginning of an energy revolution. Today, all energy used to

produce electricity and to heat buildings in the city is renewable geothermal and hydropower.

Reykjavík is determined to continue to lead the way in climate matters, as according to the City's climate policy, it plans to become carbon neutral by 2040 and by that the same year, to have automobile traffic and public transport free from greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the share of pedestrian and bicycle traffic as well as public transport is to increase strongly, in part with the introduction of the public transport project called Borgarlína (Cityline). Energy transition in transport is promoted and the share of electrically-powered transport will be increased through a variety of actions.

The City of Reykjavik has implemented eco-friendly operations and emphasised green investments to improve the environment and quality of life of residents. These include, for instance, the city's cycling program as well as the Municipal Plan for the City 2010-2030, which provides for the protection of green and open areas, increasing settlement density, strengthening public transport, ecological solutions in waste collection and requirements for eco-friendly solutions for new construction. In 2018, the City became the first issuer of "green bonds" on the Icelandic market.

Reykjavík is a participant in the Covenant of Mayors climate agreement, and in the run-up to the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, the City, along with FESTA, the centre for corporate social responsibility, took the initiative to have over 100 Icelandic companies sign a declaration to systematically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The statement has been followed up on with various types of support and education for the companies.

In addition, the City of Reykjavik received the Nordic Council's Nature and Environment Prize in 2014 for the City's effective environmental initiatives.



# Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Protecting the ocean is one of humanity's most important tasks today. It must be ensured that humanity can continue to enjoy the resources of the ocean, and that the sea continues to fulfil its many roles, including its role in the Earth's ecosystem. The marine environment needs to be protected from the threats of pollution, overfishing and negative effects of climate change. A healthy marine

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Sustainable fisheries**
- **Ocean acidification and impact on marine biota**
- **To counteract further marine pollution, not least from plastic**

ecosystem is an important source of food for hundreds of millions of people in the world. The harnessing of marine resources continues to be very important for the Icelandic economy. The Icelandic government has declared its desire to work with the business community on protecting the sea and on the sustainable utilisation of its resources through concerted actions. The Sustainable Development Goals set a specific framework for this work both domestically and internationally. In development cooperation,

Iceland places great emphasis on sustainable utilisation of living marine resources, as marine issues are a priority in Icelandic foreign policy.

## Environmental protection and climate change

The Icelandic government emphasises keeping the ocean clean, as well as minimising pollution originating on land and from external sources. The concentrations of heavy metals, persistent organic substances and other maritime pollutants in the seas around Iceland and in seafoods are much lower than in other ocean areas in Europe and far below the thresholds which could be dangerous for human health and ecosystems.<sup>96</sup> The concentration of some pollutants is declining in the ocean around Iceland, but there are growing concerns about pollution due to waste in the sea, not least plastic.

The government has adopted a waste prevention policy, "Combating Waste Together", with a special emphasis on reducing plastic waste and increasing its recycling rate. Furthermore, a government action plan is being prepared, designed to reduce plastic usage, one part of which concerns marine plastic specifically. An agreement is in place between the Recycling Fund and vessel operators on recycling fishing gear, which has yielded good results. Fishing gear waste amounts to around 1,100 tonnes

<sup>96</sup> Environment Agency, Mengun hafis og stranda (Marine and coastal pollution), ust.is.

*“Fish, birds and whales eat the plastic and the animals can die. I’ve seen pictures of dead whales and birds which is awful. My favourite bird is the whimbrel, and I saw one which was like a plastic monster, I just started to cry.”*

**Atli Svavarsson**, 11 years old

per year.<sup>97</sup> The Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019 places great emphasis on research into the extent of plastic pollution in the ocean and awareness-raising about this.<sup>98</sup>

Iceland is committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. Ocean acidity increases due to the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and it is feared that in the future the acidification will have a detrimental effect on marine biota, such as calcareous algae, shellfish and corals. The Marine and Freshwater Research Institute investigates and monitors the acidification of the ocean. Its monitoring work has a long history on a global scale and has attracted international attention. The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources has prepared a Climate Change Action Plan for 2018-2030.

### **Protection of marine and coastal areas**

The decisions of the Icelandic government on the protection and utilisation of living marine and coastal resources and the protection of the ecosystem are based on scientific advice. Iceland has given notice of 14 protection zones in the ocean within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the OSPAR Agreement database. Many other areas are closed in order to protect marine biota, especially juvenile fish. Some of the areas are temporarily closed, while others have been closed for decades. In most of these areas, the use of one or more types of fishing gear is prohibited. The authorities emphasise completing the mapping of the seabed within Iceland’s territorial waters, as mapping provides the foundation for scientific advice on the protection of sensitive marine ecosystems on the ocean floor.

### **Sustainable fishing**

Government fisheries management policy is to utilise the living resources of the sea in a sustainable manner. Efforts directed at preventing overfishing and illegal fishing have become increasingly successful.<sup>99</sup> In Iceland, a fisheries management system has been developed to promote responsible fishing on a sustainable basis, together with good management of the marine ecosystem. It is based on extensive research on fish stocks and the ecosystem. Decisions on fishing and total allowable catches (TACs)

<sup>97</sup> Recycling Fund, Veidarfæri: Veidarfæri úr gerviefnum (Fishing Gear: Fishing gear made of synthetic materials), [urvinnslusjodur.is](http://urvinnslusjodur.is).

<sup>98</sup> Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018. A Common Path: Iceland’s presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Ministry of Industries and Innovation, 2 June 2017, Adoption of Fisheries Management Plans with long term precautionary Harvest Control Rules for commercially harvested fish stocks in Icelandic waters.





are made on the basis of scientific advice and both fishing and reporting of catches is strictly supervised. The Icelandic fisheries sector enjoys no government subsidies, which encourage overfishing and over-investment in fishing fleet capacity.

## International actions

In international development cooperation, the Icelandic government's policy is to utilise Icelandic expertise in solving international and local challenges, such as in the field of fisheries. The UNU Fisheries Training Programme has been operating in Iceland since 1998 with the aim of enhancing the expertise of experts in developing countries in fisheries and fishing. In so doing, the Icelandic government contributes to promoting sustainable fisheries and processing of products in the countries concerned.

Iceland finances an expert in the field of fisheries at the World Bank based in Accra, Ghana. In cooperation with the World Bank, Iceland is involved in fisheries projects in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which have SDG 14 as their overarching objective. The objective of the programme is to contribute to sustainable use and conservation of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and improved livelihoods in fishing communities. Iceland also cooperates with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on a project aimed at supporting and implementing the FAO Port State Measures Agreement in Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean and West African countries. The aim of this Agreement is to prevent landings of illegal catches.

Iceland is also a founding member of the World Bank's ProBlue Fund which focuses on the oceans and blue economy, especially sustainable fisheries management and measures to combat marine plastic pollution. Iceland also supports the UN Environment Agency's campaign to combat plastic pollution in the ocean.

Iceland is hosting the Arctic Council's working group on marine issues (PAME), whose office is located in Akureyri. In addition, Iceland has been a leading voice in international cooperation on marine issues, the law of the sea, and fisheries at the United Nations, FAO and in regional fisheries management, including the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). Iceland actively participates in World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Geneva on target 14.6, which aims to prohibit or restrict state subsidies in the fisheries sector. Iceland chaired the meeting of signatory states to the Law of the Sea Convention in 2017 and took an active part in the UN's Ocean Conference, which was held in June of the same year in support of the implementation of SDG 14. At this conference, Iceland's Minister of Fisheries chaired discussions on marine research and the dissemination of technical expertise on marine research. Furthermore, Iceland actively participates in the UN Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).





The quota system for fisheries in Iceland has resulted in a great improvement in the situation of fish stocks.

## Cost-effective fishing in harmony with the environment

In many parts of the world, fisheries have had a bad press because of overfishing and poor treatment of resources, such as discards of unwanted catches and unbridled competition for limited resources. Most people agree that one of the main reasons for this sad situation is the lack of well-defined fishing rights. Competition for fish leads to large-scale over-investment in vessels and equipment, resulting in wastage in the industry estimated at as much as USD 83 billion annually, according to the World Bank.

In the 1980s, the Icelandic government realised that radical measures had to be taken to protect fish stocks in the country's waters. Following experiments with a variety of methods to restrict fishing, the catch-quota system with proportional shares was selected and later the transfer of catch quotas was permitted to facilitate the fishing industry's rationalisation in response to changing circumstances.

Few people realised in the beginning how the system of the quota shares and their transfer would revolutionise the fishing industry in Iceland, changing the emphasis from "catching as much in as short a time as possible" to "producing as much value as possible from your quota".

The fishing industry has not benefited from state subsidies in Iceland in recent years, but when the situation in the sector began to improve, the state began to tax these fishing rights directly by levying fishing fees. Once the quota system had become established for all the most valuable species, a new tone became evident in the entire industry. Previously, it was almost the rule that the authorities faced demands for higher catch quotas than scientists



advised should be allocated, but now it is the industry that wants to proceed cautiously. The result is a great improvement in the situation of fish stocks which, in tandem with the reduction in the number of fishing vessels, has led to higher catch per unit of effort (CUPE), fuel consumption in the fishing industry has decreased by 43% (1990-2016) and discards of catches are the exception. The catch quota system could be said to have enabled an incentive in the sector to maximise the long-term returns from and at the same time sustainable utilisation of the fishing resource. Furthermore, vessel operators have agreed to bring ashore all the waste materials arising from the fishing, including 8,000 tonnes of worn out fishing gear which has been recycled.





## Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

**A**nthropogenic land degradation, deforestation and desertification present major challenges for sustainable development and the fight against poverty in the world. It is important to combat further deforestation and desertification and work effectively to reclaim land quality to achieve the goal of protecting life on land. Icelandic terrestrial ecosystems are shaped by fact that the country is volcanic,

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **To continue to build a network of protected areas that cover as many aspects of Icelandic nature as possible**
- **To work on land restoration, halt ecosystem degradation and address biodiversity decline**
- **To ensure sustainable use of land ecosystems**

geologically young oceanic island distant from other countries, located in the far north, edging on the Arctic Circle. In addition, human settlement made a major impact and land ecosystems are strongly influenced by the actions of humans who, for most of their habitation period, were dependent upon them for their livelihood. As an example, most of the country's forests and woodlands were depleted, vegetation degraded by unsustainable grazing and wetlands drained for agricultural use. These degradation processes of former times have now been halted for the most part. However, land restoration and ensuring sustainable land use, as well as protecting life on land, is no small task. The increasing effects of climate change in recent decades have already had a noticeable effect on the country's ecosystems and will continue to do so.

### Conservation of biological diversity

An important aspect of sustainable development is to halt the decline of biological diversity and enhance its sustainable use. To achieve this, various actions need to be taken to protect the natural environment. Here the new Nature Conservation Act of 2015 is of great importance for Iceland, guiding and supporting such measures.

Protected areas are important instruments for nature conservation. Iceland has made this a priority and more than 20% of the country is currently protected. However, these protected areas do not represent sufficiently the protection of biodiversity and those plant and animal habitats which need protection. In recent years systematic efforts have been directed at classification of the country's natural habitats. This classification points out what areas of the country are most important to protect. It creates a good knowledge base to organise the necessary protection actions to prevent deterioration of biological diversity in Iceland. The Icelandic Institute of Natural History compiles Regional Red Lists for the biota of Iceland. In

*“Mother Earth can live without us,  
but we can’t live at all without her.”*

**Svava Arnarsdóttir**, 9 years old

2018 the IINH published Red Lists for vascular plants, birds and mammals. A total of 56 vascular plant species are on the IINH’s 2018 Red List, 41 species of birds, and 5 species of mammals.<sup>100</sup>

Legislation on the country’s wildlife basically provides for protection of all species, although exceptions are granted for hunting certain species.

Invasive alien species can contribute to the depletion of biological diversity, which needs to be addressed. Few imported species have proved to be invasive in Iceland. It is important to restrict their spread and seek ways to prevent the importation of new alien species which may prove to be invasive.

The government has given priority to nature conservation and sustainable development in the interior highlands and aims to establish a national park there with the aim of nature conservation and sustainable use. The national park will be by far the largest national park in Europe, and place Iceland in this respect in the forefront.

### **Protection, recovery and sustainable use of ecosystems, including forests**

The fight against erosion, degradation of vegetation and desertification began over a century ago in Iceland. Although considerable progress has been made demanding tasks remain in securing sustainable land use and restoring ecosystems.

After centuries of destruction, deforestation has been halted in Iceland. Forested areas reached a low point in the 1970s, covering a mere one per cent of the country. The country’s natural birch forests and woodlands are now spreading substantially due to the interplay of forestry actions and reduced grazing. Furthermore, afforestation with the broader objective of sustainable development has increased, especially due to carbon sequestration and localised value creation. The area covered by forest has more than doubled in the past decades.<sup>101</sup>

A large part of lowland wetlands was drained for agricultural use during the years after WW II and until the 1980s. This had a major impact on life on land. Only part of the land that was drained, however, was used for agriculture. Iceland is committed to seek ways to restore degraded wetland ecosystems due to their important biodiversity and mitigate climate change. A significant part of the vegetation cover in the country’s grasslands ecosystem has been disrupted, not least in the more

<sup>100</sup> Icelandic Institute for Natural History, en.ni.is.

<sup>101</sup> Icelandic Forest Service, 2017, Forestry in a Treeless Land, 5th edition.

sensitive areas of the volcanic belt. Soil reclamation work attempts to restore the vegetation and soil in these areas.

The government has plans to increase significantly in the coming years support for restoration of land ecosystems, both for the positive effects this has on biodiversity and ecosystems and the mitigating impact on climate change that such actions have.

### **International actions**

Iceland has been actively involved in the international debate on the impact of desertification and the restoration of ecosystems in sustainable development. In cooperation with the United Nations University, Iceland operates a Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT), which works on increasing developing countries' expertise in this field and shares Iceland's experience in restoring land quality and land reclamation. Iceland is one of the founding members of the Group of Friends on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD), which has managed to draw more attention to land conservation and reclamation and halting land depletion in the SDGs than was anticipated. In the past year, Iceland has also led negotiations on a resolution on desertification and land reclamation in the Second UN Committee, dealing with sustainable development.

Iceland has also devoted efforts to ensure that ecosystem recovery issues can become part of integrated action to combat climate change through the UN Climate Change Convention (UN FCCC). Icelandic experts have also participated in the Global Soil Partnership for Food Security under the auspices of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

In addition, the country has been an active participant in a number of international agreements on life on land, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (UN-CBD), the Ramsar Convention on the Protection of Wetlands and the CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The working group of the Arctic Council on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) is based in Akureyri, North Iceland.





SDG target **15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.5** and **15.9**

PHOTO BY HREINN ÓSKARSSON



The purpose of Hekluskógar is to increase the resilience of the ecosystem to tephra from volcanic eruptions and to prevent the drift and distribution of the ash by water and winds.

## Hekluskógar Forests

The aim of Hekluskógar is to restore birch forests covering about 90,000 hectares in the vicinity of the volcano Mt. Hekla. The purpose of the project is to increase the resilience of the ecosystem to tephra from volcanic eruptions and to prevent the drift and distribution of the ash by water and winds, which can have a significant negative impact on the ecosystem and human society. In addition, the restoration of ecosystems in the areas will increase biodiversity, carbon sequestration and possibilities for utilisation of land that was previously depleted of topsoil by wind erosion. The project's methodology is based on stabilising the soil surface layer and forming islands of birch and willow which then spread naturally.

Since its inception in 2007, the project has been organised in cooperation with landowners and local authorities in the area. Landowners in the area have been actively involved in the recovery work by planting seedlings and have received support to do so from the project. In total, agreements have been concluded with 236 landowners for such collaboration. Companies, civil society and schools have also been actively involved, spending a full or half day as volunteers in the area, planting, fertilising and sowing. In parallel with this, volunteers receive instruction on the area and recovery work.





## Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

According to the think-tank Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), Iceland is considered one of the most peaceful countries in the world, and has been since 2008.<sup>102</sup> However, many things can still be improved, and the Icelandic government is committed to addressing urgent issues such as violence in Icelandic society. In its foreign policy Iceland aims to make a contribution towards peaceful

### MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Fight against organised crime**
- **Reduce all types of violent offences**
- **Promote trust in politics, the administration and the justice system**

settlement of disputes, respect for international law and human rights, gender equality, democracy and prosperity.

### Rule of law

Equal access to the judicial system in Iceland is the cornerstone of Icelandic justice, and reinforcing the rule of law is an ongoing objective. To this end, specific consideration needs to be given to the various needs of individuals and groups, such as children, persons with disabilities, and people of foreign origin, in order to ensure equal access to

the judicial system and enable all individuals to exercise their rights. From 1 January 2018 the court system in Iceland has three instances, instead of the former two. The change is aimed at further strengthening the justice system.



### Violence

The Icelandic government has placed strong emphasis on reducing any and all types of violence. In March 2017 a national consultation process was set up including social services, child protection authorities, the education and healthcare systems, the police and prosecution authorities under the leadership of the Ministries of Welfare, Justice and Education, Science and Culture to prepare a 4-year action plan to counter violence in Icelandic society. A consultation group on handling of sexual offences by the criminal justice system submitted an action plan to the Minister of Justice in 2017 and the government approved additional funding for introduction of actions. Work on the plan is progressing well and positive results of the actions are immediately visible. In addition, at the beginning of 2018 a steering group was established on improvements against sexual violence (see the section on SDG 5) which will follow up on the implementation, prepare a policy for actions against online/digital sexual violence and advocate the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and

<sup>102</sup> Vision of Humanity, Global Peace Index 2018, [visionofhumanity.org](http://visionofhumanity.org).

*“If we want to live in a just society, all voices need to be equally heard. The voices of children need to be heard, for example when decisions are to be made that affect children.”*

**Lilja Margrét Óskarsdóttir**, 17 years old

Domestic Violence, which Iceland ratified in 2018. A part of its preparation was to enshrine two criminal provisions in the Icelandic penal code, on the prohibition of violence in close relationships and on forced marriage. The aim is to place Iceland at the forefront in combating all forms of gender-based violence. In order for that to be realised, specific attention needs to be directed at vulnerable groups in greater danger of being subjected to violence, such as persons with disabilities and women of foreign origin.



## **Child protection**

Iceland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and directly incorporated it into domestic law. In 2018, Iceland's fifth and sixth report on its implementation was compiled. In preparing the report, emphasis was placed on participation of children. It included a special children's report with messages from children as an appendix to the state's report. The government of Iceland has placed major emphasis on following up on children's rights under the Convention, and this is reflected in, among other things, the government's coalition platform and the government's fiscal strategy. Iceland ranks first in the KidsRights Index 2019, which measures to what extent children's rights are respected worldwide. Nevertheless, the government plans to devote additional efforts to safeguarding the rights of children at all times.<sup>103</sup>

The official title of the Minister of Social Affairs has now been changed to the Minister of Social Affairs and Children, and at the beginning of 2019 he appointed a special inter-ministerial steering group on children's affairs. Among other things, the group, in collaboration with the parliamentary committee on Children's Affairs and the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities, aims to review the Child Protection Act, the social framework for children's affairs, and services for children countrywide. Furthermore, the government of Iceland recently approved a proposal from the Minister of Social Affairs and Children to aim to increase participation of children in government policy formulation and have major decision-making and legislative proposals reviewed based on their impact on the position and rights of children. Protection of children against violence has been a priority for the Icelandic state. The Children's House has been operating since 1998, where children suspected of being victims of sexual violence or other serious violence have received all services in one place. In 2018, a new Children's House office opened in Akureyri to increase the access of children outside the capital region to the necessary specialist services.

<sup>103</sup> KidsRights, kidsrights.org.

The Children's House conducts preliminary interviews and/or questioning in cases where there is a suspicion that children have suffered sexual violence or harassment. Interviews with children who have come to Iceland without guardians and apply for international protection also take place in the Children's House.

Work has been carried out on an assessment of the position of children seeking international protection and a report prepared proposing improvements with regard to these children. In addition, UNICEF in Iceland, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Iceland Academy of the Arts, the Design Centre of Iceland and the Association of Industrial and Product Designers, operate the project HEIMA: reception of children in search of international protection from the child's point of view. The aim of the project is to identify the main challenges facing the reception of unaccompanied children and children who come to Iceland accompanied by adults, with the aim of enabling Iceland to fulfil its obligations for the reception of children and ensuring that actions are guided by what is best for the child.

Iceland has ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, the Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, and the Convention Concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour. The authorities are also working on priority actions against human trafficking and other forms of exploitation, with special provision for assistance to children.

The Judicial Affairs and Education Committee of the Icelandic Parliament is currently discussing a bill, submitted by the Prime Minister, that addresses new and changed attitudes towards official registration of gender and increased rights of trans people. The bill would permit individuals 15 years of age and older to define their gender on their own terms and determine their public registration in that regard. Children under the age of 15 are also granted this authorisation with the consent of their parents/guardian or if an expert committee accedes to the child's request to change the registration of its gender. The bill confirms the right of individuals to change their gender as registered to accord with their own gender identity, without having to undergo a medical diagnosis and medical treatment or satisfy requirements for behavioural conditioning. Furthermore, the bill authorizes registration as neither male nor female. The draft bill generally received very positive responses in the government consultation portal with the public at the beginning of 2019.



## **Organised crime and corruption**

Criminal activities are becoming increasingly global in nature and the Icelandic government has responded to this by increasing its international cooperation and strengthening national institutions in the criminal justice system and elsewhere. Iceland is a party to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the international law enforcement agencies Interpol and Europol, as well as participating in the Schengen cooperation. Iceland is also a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the government has already completed critical steps in response to FATF recommendations on measures to combat money laundering



and terrorist financing which will continue in the near future. These actions are an important part of protecting the financial system and prevent its being used as a conduit for unlawful gains from criminal activities. This work is also very important in the fight against organised crime. Iceland is furthermore a member of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in international business transactions, and the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The government reports regularly to these agencies on Icelandic legislation, administration and other aspects of significance for assessing Iceland's performance and working towards further improvements.

### **Efficient and responsible organisations**

The Icelandic government has emphasised increasing transparency in domestic policy formulation, in part through legislation and awareness-raising. To this end the parliament has adopted a code of professional ethics, intended in part to increase transparency; judges and prosecutors have also adopted a code of ethics. GRECO has emphasised the need to improve disclosure of parliamentarians' interests, which includes ministers, most of whom are also MPs. The government's platform emphasises proper working practices, open government and transparency. The Prime Minister appointed a working group to review the rules on disclosure of interests for both ministers and members of parliament, taking into account suggestions and international criteria. The Prime Minister also appointed a committee for reform of legislation on freedom of speech, media and information in the form of amendments to legislation concerning protection of whistleblowers and improvements to the administrative environment, in part following suggestions from international agencies. The committee submitted nine bills proposing reforms. The Parliament Presidium will be encouraged to open its accounts, similar to what has already been done in Government Offices.

### **Administrative transparency and public participation**

The government will direct efforts to strengthening confidence in politics and public administration. In recent years Icelandic administration has moved towards becoming more responsive and increasing public participation in decision-making. Furthermore, in the spirit of open government, in recent years the government opened a new Government Offices web, offering the possibility of input from the public and the private sector by various means. A consultation portal has also been opened, where the public is given an opportunity to express its views concerning bills of legislation and other strategic decision-making by the government. In addition, in 2016 a new Act on Public Finances was adopted, linking together government policies with state finances. Implementation of the Act will make the budgeting process more transparent, strategic emphases more visible and directly linked with appropriations, which will also make the budgeting process more accessible to the public.

Freedom of expression and access to information are among the cornerstones of Icelandic society, cf. for instance, Art. 73 of the Icelandic Constitution, which states that every person is entitled to express his/her views. The Information Act is also to ensure that the government's activities are transparent and all information and data is to be made public unless exceptional circumstance require otherwise. According to international assessments, media freedom is well ensured in Iceland, which is ranked 14th on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders. The European Court of Human Rights has also delivered judgments in recent years confirming violations of the freedom of expression of journalists. The Icelandic government views these judgments seriously and is working on ensuring that Icelandic legislation and judicial practice is consistent with international commitments in this regard.

### **International actions**

Iceland was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council in July 2018 and will hold a seat there to the end of 2019. This is one of the largest tasks undertaken by the Foreign Service at the UN and a unique opportunity to influence, for example, traditional focus issues such as women's rights and gender equality, the rights of LGBT people and the rights of children.

In the Human Rights Council, Iceland, together with the other Nordic countries, supported the establishment of a special representative to monitor the rights of LGBT people at UN level. In the Council's session in March 2019, Iceland also played an active role in ensuring support for an historic resolution proposed by the South African delegate on women and girls in sport. The adoption of this resolution affirms for the first time that individuals should not be subjected to unnecessary interventions. The resolution, in fact, recognises for the first time the rights of people with atypical sexual characteristics.

The opportunity to have an influence through the forum of the Human Rights Council arises in part in participation in discussions, which representatives of Iceland have done to a much greater extent than before, since Iceland was elected to the Council, often addressing the aforementioned issues of emphasis. An example which could be mentioned here is the joint declaration of 36 nations on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, which Iceland tabled and promoted. It focused, among other things, on activists working for democratic and human rights in Saudi Arabia.

The seat on the Human Rights Council follows Iceland's leadership in 2017-2018 of the Committee for Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (the Third Committee) at the UN General Assembly. This was the first time in over 50 years that Iceland held the chairmanship of one of the sub-committees of the General Assembly.

Iceland chaired talks on the fifth revision of the UN Action Plan on Anti-Terrorism in the summer of 2016, with special emphasis on the role of women and youth in the fight against terrorism. Iceland has continued to be a vocal advocate of gender equality and women's empowerment at the UN. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, for instance, signed a framework agreement with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) and the President of Iceland is a





spokesman for the HeForShe initiative. In cooperation with other states, the Icelandic government has organised a large number of so-called “barber shop” events, which have been attended by over two thousand people, half of them male, to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of male involvement in gender-equality issues.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs chairs the National Committee on International Humanitarian Law, which was established in accordance with commitments by the Icelandic government and the Icelandic Red Cross at the 2007 Red Cross International Conference. Work is ongoing on carrying out four joint undertakings for the period 2017-2019. They concern, among other things, protection of refugees coming from conflict areas, assistance to victims of human trafficking, decreasing prejudice against foreigners and at the same time facilitate mutual integration into society, and respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian issues. The implementation of these undertakings is proceeding on schedule and work has begun on preparing new ones which will be announced at the International Red Cross Convention in December 2019.

The Icelandic government made a substantial contribution in connection with the increased flow of refugees in Europe in 2016. A total of two billion Icelandic krónur have been provided since late 2015 in response to the problems faced by refugees, both in humanitarian aid in regions near war zones and in receiving refugees in Iceland. In the autumn of 2018, the government agreed that the next group of quota refugees would number 75 people: people of Syrian origin, on the one hand, and LGBT people, on the other, who have fled persecution in their home country, Uganda. Iceland’s third National Programme for Women, Peace and Security was approved last autumn. It emphasises broad co-ordination and education work by those domestic actors who play a key role in the safety of women in Iceland. Among other things, reference is made to actions in relation to women in a vulnerable position, trafficking in women, refugee women and applicants for international protection, as well as measures against gender and sexual violence. In connection with this, a collaborative project was set up in 2016 with UN Women and the Ministry of Social Affairs in Mozambique. The main objective of the project is to ensure that the processes and programmes that promote peace, security and reconstruction in the Mozambique community contribute to equality and empowerment of women and girls. This year, a collaborative project with UN Women in Turkey will be launched in support of Syrian refugee women. The project focuses on implementing gender equality commitments in humanitarian work, including on the basis of Resolution no. 1325. The project operators will receive advice in promoting gender awareness in reception of refugees and strengthening the empowerment and resilience of refugee women. This accords with Iceland’s international development cooperation policy, which is guided by human rights, equality, peace and security.



The project against domestic violence involved changing priorities and procedures, and sending a clear message that domestic violence would not be tolerated and was not the private concern of those subjected to it.

## United against domestic violence

In 2013, the police in the Southern Peninsula of Iceland (Suðurnes) launched a pilot project in collaboration with local authorities in the district to improve service to victims of domestic violence.

The project involved changing priorities and procedures, and sending a clear message that domestic violence would not be tolerated and was not the private concern of those subjected to it. Emphasis was placed on providing the best possible help to people who live with violence, preventing repeated violations, and completing investigations of domestic violence thoroughly, something rarely seen before. Efforts were also made to utilise better legal remedies on restraining orders and removal from the household, which had previously been applied seldom if ever. The collaboration was considered to bring positive results, and in December 2014 this new approach was implemented in the procedures of the National Commissioner of Police for all police districts in the country.

Collaboration against domestic violence entails, among other things, that the police always request on-site assistance from child protection in cases where there are children in homes, or otherwise seek the consent of the parties to request the assistance of social services if no children are involved. A thorough and detailed investigation of the issues is then begun immediately on location and the parties advised on assistance and how things will proceed. Legislative provisions are utilised to proceed with cases without the





involvement of victims, as in many cases it is extremely onerous for victims to lay charges against those close to them. Particular emphasis is placed on assisting and safeguarding the interests of children living with domestic violence.

When the police have responded to an emergency call concerning domestic violence, it opens a certain window of opportunity, as the victim is frightened and ready to provide information on events and receive assistance from the police. This time must be utilised well, both to investigate the case and also ensure that victims and offenders receive appropriate social, psychological and legal assistance and ensure security. Efforts must be directed specifically at preventing offenders from repeatedly using violence. The pilot project in the Suðurnes region, which was given the title of “Keeping the window open”, was adopted by other police districts in Iceland, and has attracted attention beyond the country’s shores.





# Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Sustainable Development Goal 17 concerns strengthening domestic and international cooperation on sustainable development and is a wake-up call to all states to fulfil their commitments. The SDGs are, among other things, based on the fact that poverty is one of mankind’s greatest challenges and needs to be eradicated by 2030. Iceland’s objective in international development cooperation

## MAIN CHALLENGES:

- **Have Iceland’s contribution to development co-operation amount to 0.7 per cent of GNI in accordance with UN criteria**
- **Increase private sector investment that contributes to sustainable development**

is to contribute to the fight against poverty in the world and thus fulfil the political and moral obligations of Icelanders. To achieve the SDGs by 2030 the flow of capital to developing countries needs to be increased. Other factors are also important, such as capacity building and technical knowledge, trade and systemic issues.

### Finance

The Icelandic government supports the UN target for developed countries to provide development assistance amounting to 0.7% of GNI; in 2017 contributions from member states of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) amounted to 0.31% of GNI on average. Iceland’s public contribution to international development cooperation in 2017 amounted to 0.29% of GNI,<sup>104</sup> which is a considerable increase from 2015 when contributions

amounted to 0.24% of GNI.<sup>105</sup> This increase can partly be attributed to higher expenses for reception of refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland. One of the most significant suggestions of the OECD-DAC peer review conducted in 2017 on Iceland’s development cooperation was that Icelanders should increase their contributions, as the nation had all the prerequisites for so doing. The government’s platform also states its intention to increase appropriations for development cooperation to 0.35% of GNI by 2022.

It is important to ensure that the poorest countries benefit from development aid; Iceland’s development cooperation places emphasis on cooperation with poor countries where living conditions are most difficult. The previously mentioned OECD DAC peer review of Iceland’s international development cooperation in 2017 stated that over 40% of Iceland’s development assistance in 2015 went to very poor countries, which is a considerably higher proportion than the average for member states of the DAC (28%).



<sup>104</sup> OECD, 9 April 2018, Development aid stable in 2017 with more sent to poorest countries.

<sup>105</sup> OECD, 8 April 2014, Development aid stable in 2014 but flows to poorest countries still falling.

*“Everyone can work together to help some countries that are very poor, in Africa, or in Norway, if there is an eruption or something.”*

**Valdimar Helgi Sævarsson**, 7 years old

The need for capital in developing countries goes far beyond the capacity of public development aid, as reiterated in the results of the International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in 2015. Therefore, it is clear that private investment that contributes to sustainability, combats poverty and hunger, and promotes general prosperity is essential to achieve the SDGs. To this end, the Icelandic government supports institutions that, among other things, contribute to private sector investment. These include the World Bank, which has a massive scope and emphasises the importance of the private sector in financing development. For example, two subsidiaries of the Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), work exclusively with the private sector in the form of investment guarantees, loans and financing to encourage investment in developing countries and increased trade with developing countries.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has also emphasised utilising Icelandic expertise in international organisations. In cooperation with the World Bank, consultancy lists have been established in the field of geothermal energy and fisheries. All technical assistance and solutions provided in this context are provided in response to requests, either from the Bank’s partner countries or the Bank itself, which enables Iceland’s specialist contribution to be used in a wider context and ensures the value of the aid for the countries concerned. By linking Iceland’s expertise in this way to the work of international organisations, the experience of corporations in the international arena can be utilised and thus create important connections for potential future projects.

Developing countries also need assistance to achieve a sustainable debt position and promote responsible financial management, for instance, through debt relief and restructuring. To this end, Iceland participates in debt relief for developing countries through the World Bank, on the one hand, through the International Development Agency (IDA) and, on the other, the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI).

### **Technology and capacity building**

Knowledge sharing and the distribution of environmentally friendly technologies to developing countries must be promoted. Iceland’s international development cooperation has focused considerably on these actions. Through the activities of the United Nations University in Iceland, the Icelandic authorities contribute to the transfer of knowledge to developing countries and to capacity building and skills



in the areas of geothermal energy, fisheries, land restoration and gender equality. Capacity building and skills are also at the heart of all bilateral partnerships that support regional governments in providing basic services such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation facilities.

The Icelandic government has also cooperated on geothermal research in East Africa. The project is aimed at assisting countries in initial research to determine whether useful geothermal energy can be found there. The geothermal project involves the sharing of environmentally friendly technology and the utilisation of sustainable energy options. Similarly, Iceland has supported the establishment of a regional training centre in Kenya for geothermal development in Africa. The UNU Geothermal Training Programme in Iceland is involved in this work.

## Trade

Trade which takes perspectives of sustainability and social responsibility into account encourages successful economic development. In this context, it is important to strengthen business connections and increase investment in developing countries. Trade barriers for developing countries need to be reduced, to facilitate them in placing their products on the market. Here the World Trade Organisation (WTO) plays a key role. Iceland has emphasised and will continue to emphasise completing negotiations in the Doha round, in which the country has taken part, and has supported this objective. Furthermore, Iceland has made efforts to place gender equality issues on the agenda of WTO discussions on international trade. Iceland signed an agreement with the International Trade Centre (ITC) following an examination of how the Icelandic government could support developing countries in connection with trade issues. The country's support is partly earmarked for the women's economic empowerment initiative SheTrades, aimed at connecting women and women entrepreneurs, in developing countries and in war-torn areas, with markets. An Act to Facilitate Market Access of Products Produced in Least Developed Countries, was adopted by the parliament on 8 June 2018.



## Systemic issues

Iceland's international development cooperation emphasises collaboration and mutual responsibility for success. In this context, ensuring good governance and combating corruption is a key factor. As an example of ownership and mutual responsibility for success, one could mention that Iceland's bilateral development cooperation places emphasis on supporting partner programmes, with both regional and national governments. It is important that locals themselves be responsible for projects and that their ownership of actions is clear. At the same time, emphasis is placed on carefully monitoring the success of projects. They are all regularly evaluated by independent bodies based on international standards. Global cooperation on sustainable development needs to be strengthened and the involvement of civil society to this end is of great importance. For many years, the Foreign Ministry has provided grants for civil society projects.



## Multiparty partnerships

In Iceland, cooperation on SDG issues is prominent in the public sector, between the public sector and private sector, and in partnership with civil society organisations and citizens. For example, projects in the field of social welfare, such as humanitarian aid by civil society organisations collaborating with the state, municipalities and private companies. Another example of broad collaboration is in health-promoting communities, schools and workplaces. Mention could also be made of collaborative environmental projects, such as the Climate Change Council, and in connection with implementation of the government's Climate Action Plan.

One communications channel offered by the government is an electronic consultation portal that was opened in 2018 to enhance public and stakeholder participation in policy-making, drafting rules and decision-making by public authorities. There, in one place, it is possible to find all documents published by ministries for consultation with the public and everyone is free to submit comments or suggestions. In addition, there are other types of consultation processes, such as the involvement of key stakeholders in the government's committee work or special matters sent to them for comment.

SDG target **17.1, 17.6, 17.7, 17.9** and **17.16**



Graduates from the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST) in Iceland.

## Icelandic expertise and knowledge contributing to positive change in partner countries

Capacity development plays a significant role in Iceland's international development cooperation. Four programmes, which are operated under the auspices of the UN University in Iceland, provide training and education

for professionals from developing countries with the aim of strengthening professional expertise and capacity in the fields of geothermal energy, fisheries, land restoration and gender equality in developing countries.

Each year, specialists from developing countries come for five or six months long practical training course in Iceland. In addition, successful graduates from all the programmes can apply for grants for master's or doctoral studies in Iceland. This transfer of knowledge and capacity building is an example of how specialised Icelandic expertise and experience can be used in international development cooperation and underline the potential benefits of private sector involvement in the field. This transfer of knowledge and capacity building is an example of how specialised Icelandic expertise and experience can be used in international development cooperation and underline the potential benefits of private sector involvement in the field. The results of an external evaluation conducted on the activities of the programmes in 2017 indicate that the training provided by the programmes has a direct development impact in the recipient communities.

The programmes enable students to acquire practical skills that are useful to them in their work, and have often sparked changes in their workplaces, which have subsequently contributed to wider changes in society, even changes in legislation. One example of such was the important step taken towards abolishing of child marriage in Malawi, where the former student of the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST) played a key role in joint efforts of local civil society organisations and international agencies in leading the fight against child marriage. He says that the knowledge, skills and self-confidence that he gained through his studies at the GEST were crucial in this context. In 2017, less than three years after he returned from studying in Iceland, the parliament passed a constitutional amendment raising the minimum marriage age from fifteen years to eighteen.



# Conclusions and next steps

Iceland is committed to implementing Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development both nationally and internationally and will continue to build on its strong tradition towards democracy, human rights, gender equality and sustainable use of natural resources.

The previous chapters have described the current status of Iceland's implementation process, as well as identified marginalised groups and main challenges related to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This first edition of Iceland's Voluntary National Review (VNR) report thus provides a clear starting point and a guideline for continued work.

In the VNR process, various positive steps were taken towards implementing the SDGs. The government's SDG working group has been reorganised to include representatives from all ministries. The working group's main responsibility is to follow up on the 65 priority targets adopted last year and to guide the government in their implementation over the next few years.

Follow-up mechanisms now include an annual assessment of progress towards priority targets in connection to annual reporting on the government's fiscal strategy policy objectives. The selection of priority targets will be reviewed every two years, to ensure that priority is given to targets which are farthest from being met at any given time.

Linking the SDGs directly to government strategy and objectives offers an opportunity to track efforts towards the implementation of specific targets and estimate how much funding is allocated to the implementation of the SDGs at any given time. A digital solution is being developed to provide policy makers with an overview of the targets, thereby enhancing co-ordination between policies and programmes in different areas of operation.

Efforts to encourage stakeholder engagement include partnerships with the private sector and civil society umbrella organisations, the Directorate of Health and the Association of Local Authorities, as well as the establishment of the SDG Youth Council. This first VNR report was submitted for public consultation through a government portal and the final version of the report takes relevant submissions into account. The SDG working group will continue to engage actively with all stakeholders.

A handful of municipalities lead the way in localising the SDGs, but further efforts are needed to improve implementation at the local level. This will require increased collaboration between local authorities, including enhanced flow of information and knowledge-sharing and possibly defining joint priority objectives and means of implementation. To this end, an SDG forum for active collaboration at the municipal level is scheduled to start operating in the autumn of 2019.

A recently established digital SDG information portal also provides a platform for stakeholders to submit their SDG-related projects and should be an important incentive for all stakeholders to include the SDGs in their policies and practice. The portal will also serve to increase general knowledge of the SDGs and thus encourage more effective monitoring of government actions.

Statistics Iceland will, in consultation with the SDG working group, continue to collect data in order to measure Iceland's performance against the SDGs. It is important that the data on which this is based is reliable and measures what it is actually intended to measure, as it is clear that some of the UN indicators are not very consistent with Icelandic reality. In this context, Iceland will examine whether to use national indicators as well, to be able to systematically measure the country's progress and advancement towards specific targets.

Iceland is committed to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 at the national level and contributing to their realisation globally, placing a special emphasis on marginalised groups. While some of the targets are within reach, others present major challenges. Furthermore, Iceland aims at building additional partnerships to address issues concerning human economic and social well-being, as well as the protection of the natural environment and wildlife.

Today's children and youth, the generation that will build on the progress made in the next few years, are the main stakeholders of the 2030 Agenda. It is therefore essential to include young people's opinions and ideas in the steps ahead and to ensure that decisions made today will not limit the opportunities and potential of future generations.

Sustainable development is the key to ensuring the future of our planet and its inhabitants, and Agenda 2030 provides important guidelines to move us in that direction.



Appendix  
**Statistics on the SDGs**

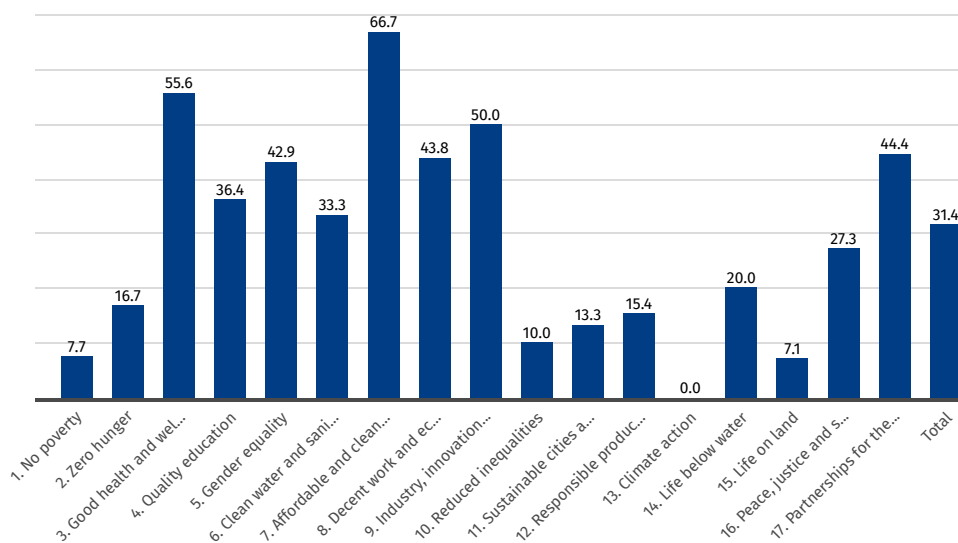




This Appendix presents a statistical picture of Iceland based on the criteria which have been used as a basis for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A total of 232 indicators have been developed by the UN to assess the progress of nations towards the goals in a harmonised way. This report includes 70 of the indicators which are based on a defined methodology. It is a good start, since it is far from the case that satisfactory definitions are available for all the indicators internationally, in addition to which a great deal of harmonisation and quality work has been done to provide a solid, long-term statistical basis for the project. Statistics Iceland has advised the SDG working group on the compilation of the statistical data. At the same time, assistance was sought from the academic community and the Institute for Sustainability Studies (ISS) at the University of Iceland was obtained to direct quality assessment by Iceland's most capable scholars of the data used as the basis for assessment of Iceland's position.

International work on specifying and describing the UN's statistical indicators continues and will provide an increasingly comprehensive picture of nations' situations with respect to the SDGs. For Iceland, the accompanying 70 indicators are a specific starting point for public debate and to gain a conception of Iceland's position. More work remains to strengthen the statistical foundations of the SDGs with the aim of presenting an even clearer picture of Iceland's position.

### ***Proportion of indicators available by goal***



Information in the Appendix is based on the data and information available at the time of writing. This has been summarised in an analysis document provided by Statistics Iceland, as part of its involvement in the SDG working group. Data and information gathering is ongoing and under further development. Both the statistical Appendix and the analysis document on which it is based will be updated as additional data and information is acquired. In most instances where the conclusion was that data on indicators has not been collected systematically and therefore is unavailable, further possibilities of obtaining suitable data and information on the indicators should be investigated.



## GOAL 1 – No poverty

For SDG 1 there are seven targets, measured by fourteen indicators. Of these fourteen indicators, eleven are based on a defined methodology, while definitions are not available for three indicators. It was concluded that one indicator is not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for one indicator.

### 1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age

In Iceland, there are no official poverty limits, but it has become customary to look at minimum income thresholds, which are defined as income below 60% of the median disposable income of all residents of the country on an annual basis. This measure reflects in particular the idea that poverty is relative, i.e. that poverty is a lack or exclusion that results from low income and that people under the above limits thus do not have sufficient resources to enjoy the quality of life considered normal in the community in which they live.



Figure 1. At-risk-of-poverty rates in Europe 2016, all persons and children

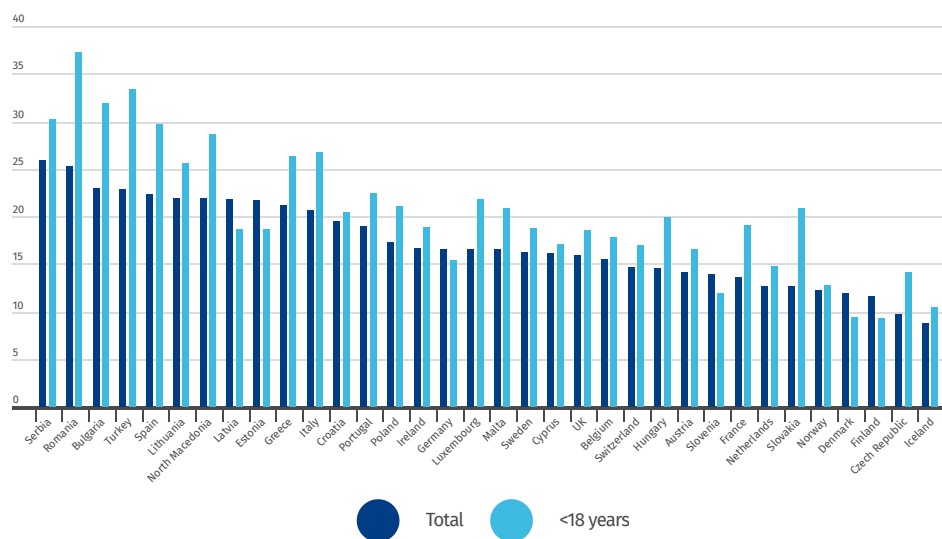
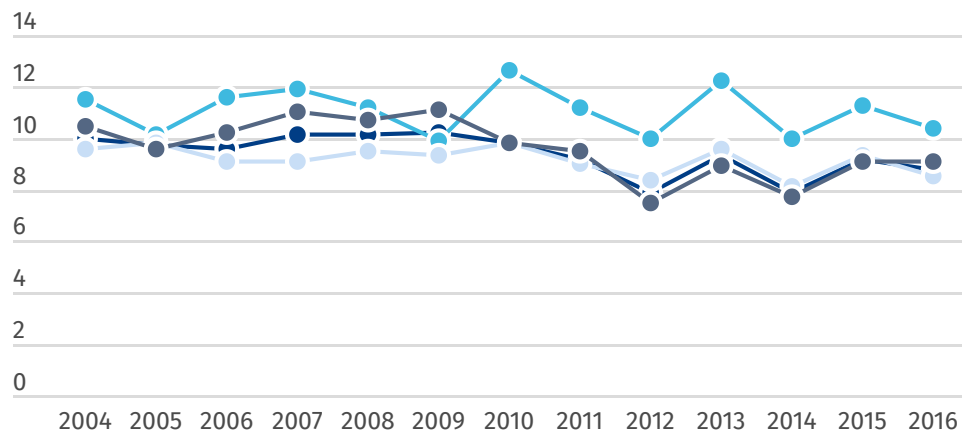




Figure 1 shows the at-risk-of-poverty rate in European countries, both for the entire population and for children 17 years of age and younger. For the entire population, the percentage is lowest in Iceland, but if only children are included, the percentage is slightly lower in Denmark and Finland.

Figure 2 shows the development of the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Iceland during the period 2004-2016. It is noteworthy that this proportion decreased in the wake of the financial collapse, at the same time as the living standards of the majority of the public deteriorated. The reason is that the income of the middle-income group declined more than that of the low-income groups. This points to an important feature of this measurement: that it can only be interpreted as a concept of relative deficiency and not as an indication of poverty in any universal sense, as it is clear that poverty increased following the collapse if the poverty threshold were defined by a fixed purchasing-power criterion instead of moving with developments in income. Similarly, reservations are necessary concerning multinational comparisons of at-risk-of-poverty rates, especially between countries with very different levels of prosperity, as it is clear that the living standards of people below the poverty line in low-income countries are much different and worse than those in the same group in high-income countries.

*Figure 2. At-risk-of-poverty rate: men, women and children*





## GOAL 2 – Zero hunger

For SDG 2 there are seven targets, measured by thirteen indicators. All of these have a defined methodology. It was concluded that one indicator is not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for two indicators.

### 2.5.2 Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk, not at risk or at unknown level of risk of extinction

Indicator 2.5.2 concerns domestic livestock at risk. Data on this is available at the Agricultural University of Iceland (LBHI). Six types of livestock are defined, or fourteen if birds are included. Of these, two are at risk, i.e. goats and “forystufé” (leader sheep).



### 2.b.1 Agricultural export subsidies

This indicator concerns export subsidies. In Iceland, there are no subsidies for exports, but there are import barriers that have the same effect. The same applies to market support for domestic products.



## GOAL 3 – Good health and well-being

For SDG 3 there are thirteen targets, measured by a total of 27 indicators. Of these, one indicator lacks a defined methodology. Data is available for fifteen indicators.

### 3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio

According to figures from the Directorate of Health, during the period 2000-2017 two cases of maternal mortality were reported. These concern deaths where the relationship to pregnancy and childbirth is clear. Since maternal mortality is very rare in Iceland, it is not appropriate to calculate it as a ratio of a certain number of births or by year.

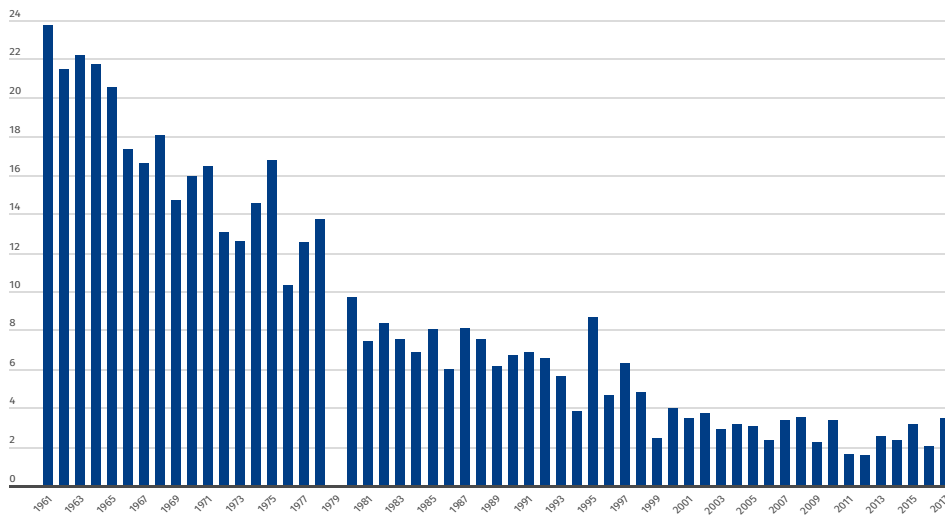


### 3.2.1 Under-5 mortality rate

Statistics Iceland collects and publishes the information on which this indicator is based annually and has done so since 1970. The UN target is a number of deaths below 25 per 1,000 live births. Iceland reached that target before systematic registration began. During the period 1961-2017, the frequency dropped considerably, from 23.7 to just under 3.4 per 1,000 live births in the country.

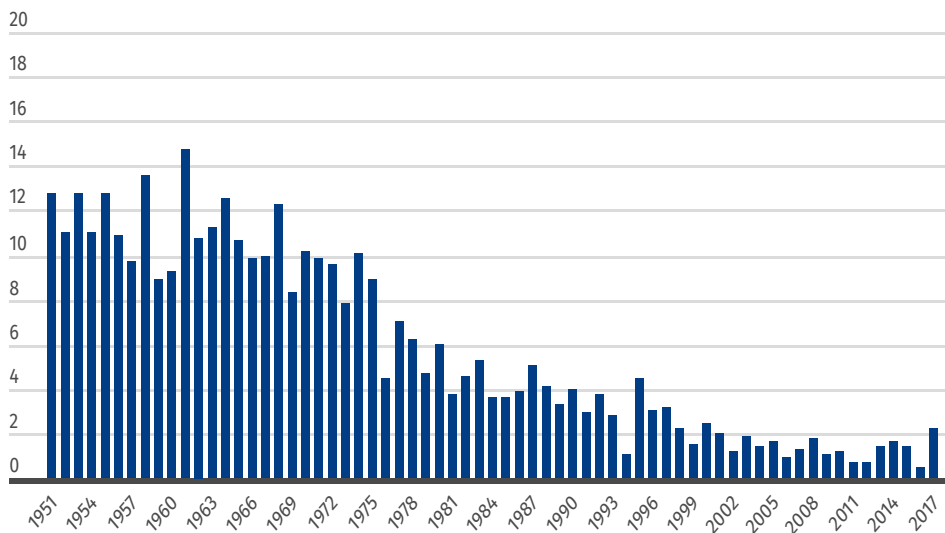


**Figure 3. Mortality rates for children under 5 years of age, deaths per 1,000 live births.**



### 3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate

**Figure 4. Number of neonatal deaths per 1,000 births**

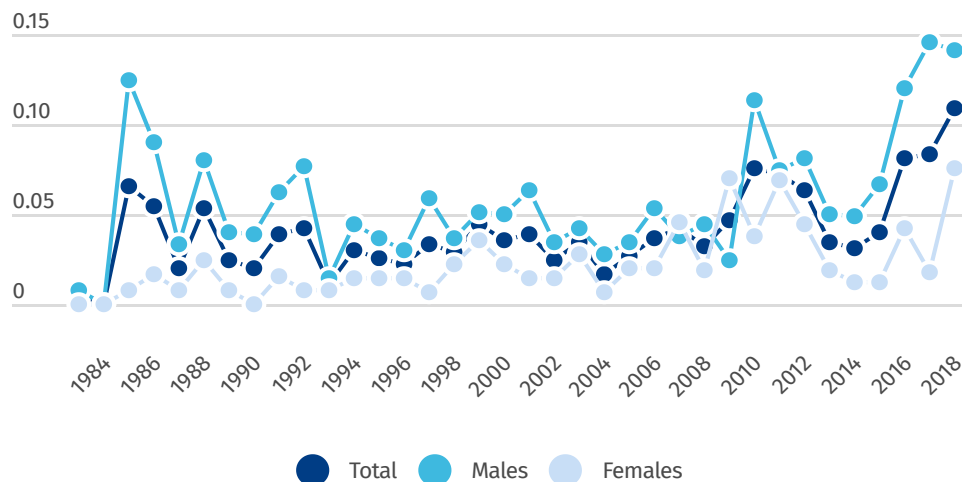


Statistics Iceland keeps track of the data on which this indicator is based and has collected this annually since 1951. The UN target is to have fewer than 12 children per thousand born die within 28 days of birth. Iceland reached that target before systematic registration began and in 2017, 2.2 children died per 1,000 births, while in 2000 the frequency was 2.5 children.

### 3.3.1 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations

The Directorate of Health has collected data on the incidence of HIV infection since 1983. In 2018, there were 0.109 per 1,000 people. The incidence is somewhat higher for males than females, or 0.141 per 1,000 for males and 0.076 for females.

Figure 5. Number of newly registered HIV infections per 1,000 population.



### 3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population

The Directorate of Health collects data on the incidence of tuberculosis; databases with information from 1997 are available. In 2015, eight people were diagnosed with tuberculosis, in 2016 they were six, ten in 2017 and three in 2018. The incidence is therefore 0.9 per 100,000 uninfected population in 2018.



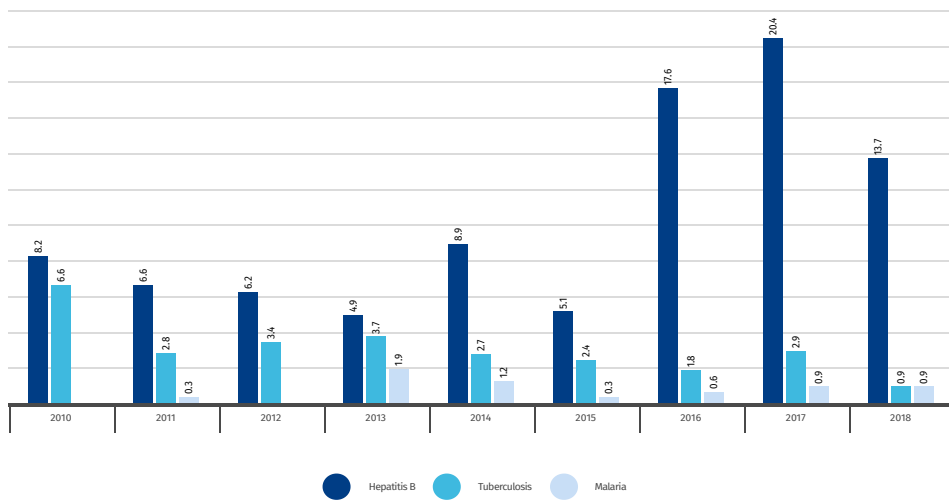
### 3.3.3 Malaria incidence per 1,000 population

The Directorate of Health collects data on diagnosed malaria infections in Iceland and data is available from 1997 onwards. In 2015, one person was diagnosed with malaria, in 2016 they were six, three in 2017 and three in 2018. The incidence is therefore just under 0.9 per 100,000 uninfected population in 2018.

### 3.3.4 Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population

The Directorate of Health collects data on the incidence of hepatitis B; data is available from 1997 onwards. In 2015, seventeen individuals were diagnosed with hepatitis B, in 2016 there were 59,70 in 2017 and 48 in 2018. The incidence was therefore around 13.7 per 100,000 uninfected population in 2018.

**Figure 6. Number of diagnosed cases of malaria, tuberculosis and hepatitis B per 100,000 non-infected population.**

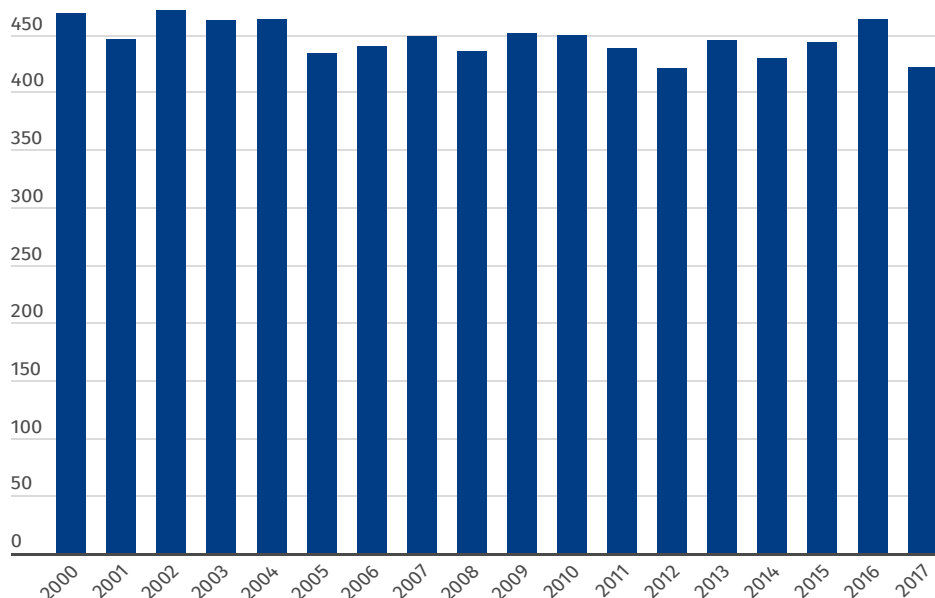


### 3.4.1 Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease

The Directorate of Health collects data on causes of death, including premature deaths due to diseases other than infectious diseases. In 2017, the number of such deaths was about 422 per 100,000 inhabitants of the country.



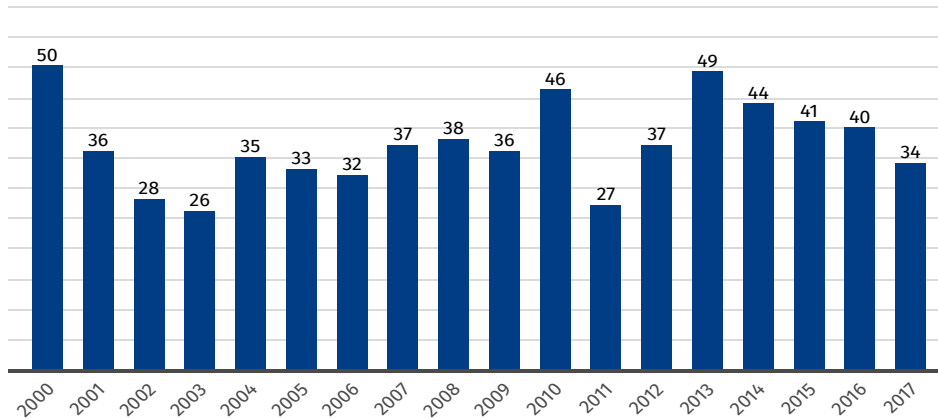
**Figure 7. Number of deaths attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and respiratory diseases per 100,000 population.**



### 3.4.2 Suicide mortality rate

The Directorate of Health collects data on deaths caused by suicide and deliberate self-harm. In 2017 there were 34 cases.

Figure 8. **Number of deaths caused by suicide and deliberate self-harm.**

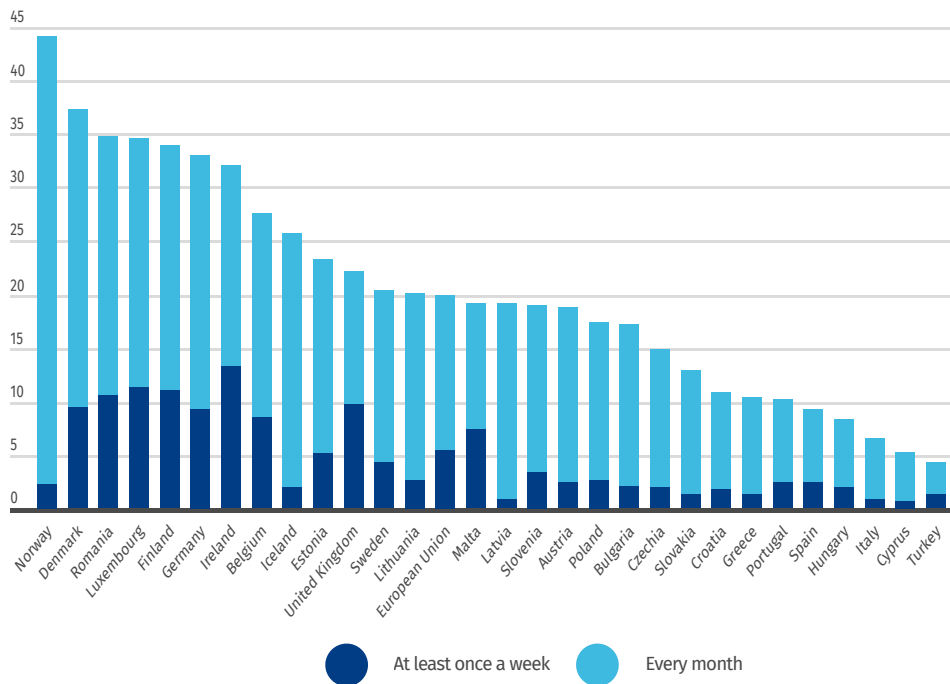


### 3.5.2 Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol

The indicator assumes that criteria for harmful use of alcohol exist in each country. There is no such official criterion in Iceland and data on alcohol consumption by individuals is not collected annually. On the other hand, there was a question on alcohol consumption in the European Health Interview Survey, which was carried out by Statistics Iceland in the autumn of 2015. In the Survey data, the incidence of excessive drinking is measured. Excessive drinking is defined as consumption of 60 grams of pure alcohol in one session, which is equivalent to 3 large beers or 5 glasses of wine.



**Figure 9. Percentage of people who consumed alcohol excessively at least once a month. European states 2014 and 2015.**



In 2015, about one-quarter of Iceland’s population consumed alcohol excessively at least once a month. The frequency was highest in Norway and Denmark, or 44% and 37.4% respectively. However, Iceland was above the EU average, which was just under 20%. If only those who consume alcohol excessively every week are included, then the situation changes, as Iceland then has the eighth-lowest rate.

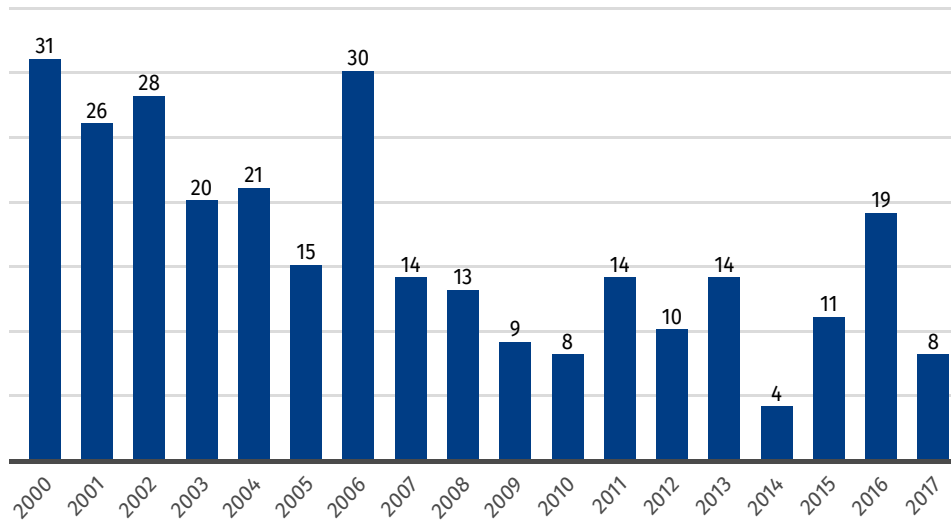
### 3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries

The Directorate of Health collects data on causes of death and Statistics Iceland publishes statistics on the basis of it. Although the number of deaths due to road traffic accidents fluctuates considerably from year to year, the trend has been downwards since the turn of the century and was lowest in 2014, with four deaths, and highest in 2000, with 31 deaths. In 2017 eight persons died in road traffic accidents.





Figure 10. **Number of deaths in road traffic accidents 1981-2017**



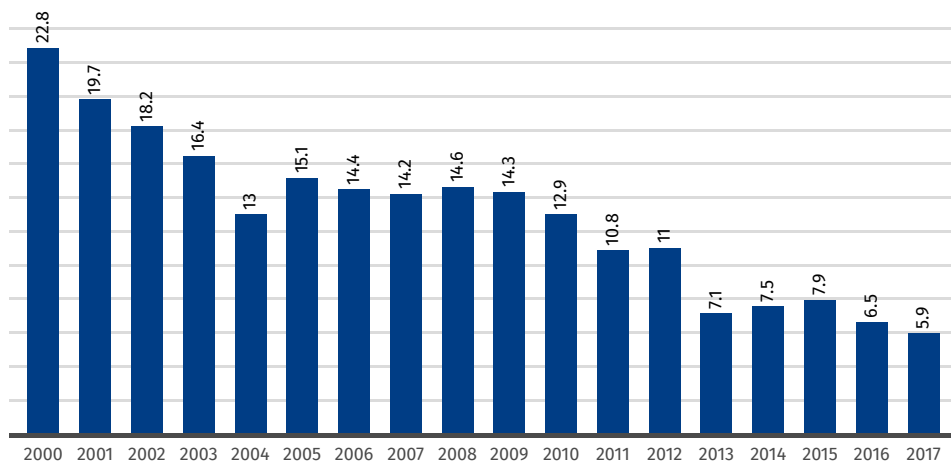
**3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods**

Data on the indicator is not systematically collected but the probability is that the proportion is 100%.



**3.7.2 Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group**

Figure 11. **Birth rate 10-14-year-olds and 15-19-year-olds per 1,000 girls of the same age.**



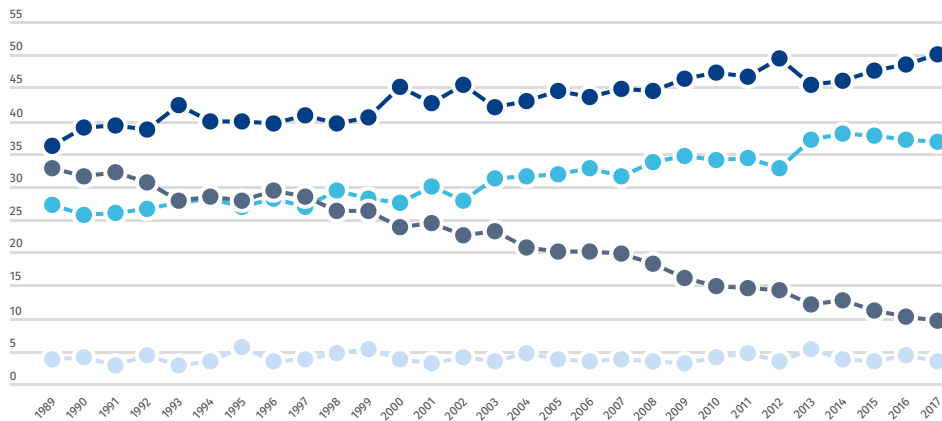
Statistics Iceland publishes statistics on birth rates, including with a breakdown by age of mother. The birth rate of 15-19-year-olds has dropped from 22.8 per 1,000 girls of the same age in 2000 to 5.9 in 2017. The birth rate for girls 14 years of age and younger is zero so far this century, although very occasionally such young girls give birth.

### 3.a.1 Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older

Statistics Iceland publishes figures on the percentage of daily smokers. The percentage has declined steadily over the past few decades, from 32.9% in 1989 to 9.5% in 2017. There is generally no statistically significant difference between males and females.



Figure 12. **Smoking habits 18-79 years**



### 3.b.2 Total net official development assistance to medical research and basic health sectors

Iceland does not specifically provide development assistance to medical research and basic health sectors, although a certain part of international development cooperation is related to the healthcare sector.





## GOAL 4 – Quality education

For SDG 4 there are ten targets, measured by eleven indicators. Of these, two indicators lack a defined methodology. Data is available for four indicators.

### 4.4.1 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill

Statistics Iceland collects information on the skills of people in various fields of IT as part of a pan-European Information Society Statistics study. Statistics Iceland started this data collection again in 2017 after pausing for several years. In the study, such skills are analysed in four areas, i.e. 1) acquisition and retention of information; 2) communication; 3) system skills; and 4) software. People’s skills in each field are assessed on a three-step scale: 1) lack basic skills; 2) basic skills; 3) more than basic skills. Finally, a composite indicator of general skills is created that takes into account the skills of people in different fields.

There is a correlation between age and skills in the use of information technology, i.e. almost everyone under the age of 45 has basic skills in all areas, but the skills decrease with each increasing age group. Nevertheless, basic skills in all areas are common in the older age groups.



Figure 13. **Percentage of people with at least general basic skills in certain areas of information technology use by age 2017**

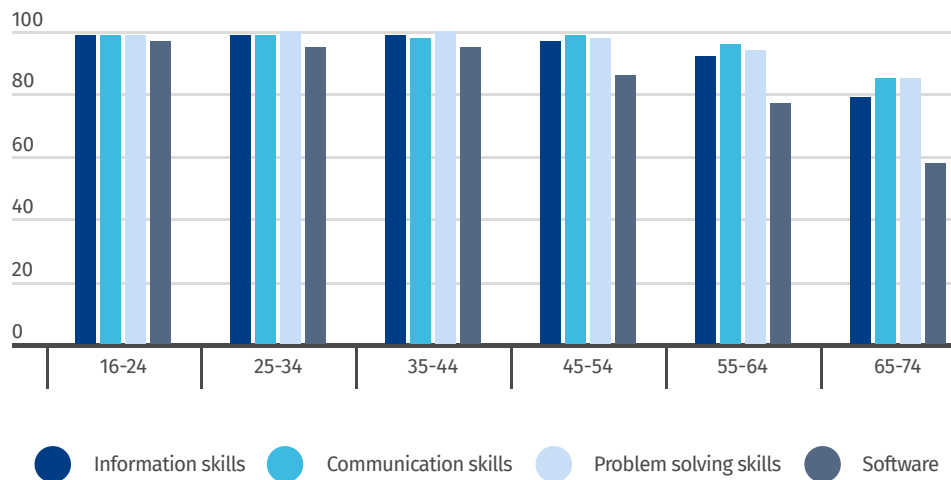
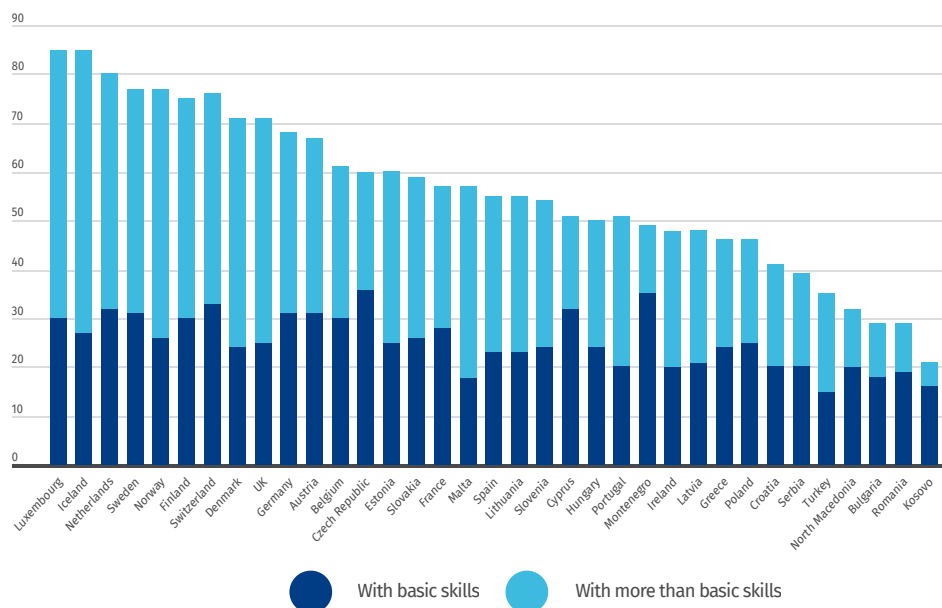


Figure 14. **Proportion of people with at least general basic skills in using computer and information technology 2017.**



The Eurostat Information Society Indicators suggest that Iceland is fairly well situated in terms of general basic skills in the use of information, as Iceland and Luxembourg are tied for first place in 2017 at 85%.

**4.a.1 Proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)**



Data on the indicator is not systematically collected but the probability is that the proportion is 100%.

**4.b.1 Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study**

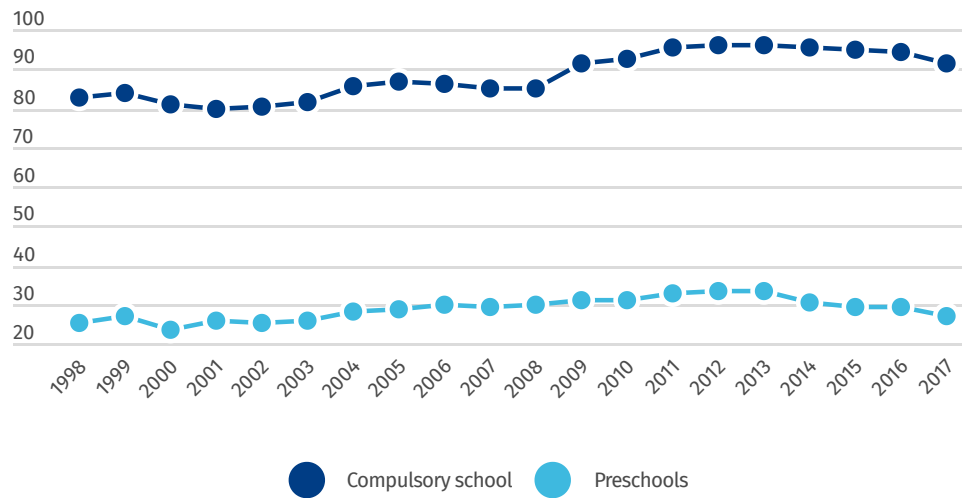


In 2016 Iceland's contribution to the four UN schools that are operated in the country was ISK 582.7 million and in 2017 ISK 673 million (Ministry for Foreign Affairs).

**4.c.1 Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organised teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country**



Figure 15. **Percentage of teachers in compulsory schools with teaching certification and the proportion of staff in preschools with preschool teacher certification, 1998-2016.**



Information on the education of staff at different school levels is published on Statistics Iceland’s website. The vast majority of teachers in compulsory schools have teaching certification, 91.4% in 2017. The percentage rose between 2008 and 2011, from 84.8% to 95.5%, then remained fairly stable at or above 95% until 2017. The percentage of staff in preschools with preschool teacher certification is quite a bit lower. The percentage rose between 2000 and 2013, from 23.7% to 33.6%, but has fallen since and in 2017 it was 27%.



## GOAL 5 – Gender equality

For SDG 5 there are nine targets, measured by a total of fourteen indicators. All of them have a defined methodology. Data is available for six indicators.

### 5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights for Males and Females, No. 10/2008, aims to establish and maintain equality and equal opportunities for women and men and thus equalise the position of women and men in all areas of society. It also stipulates how to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality and non-discrimination based on gender.

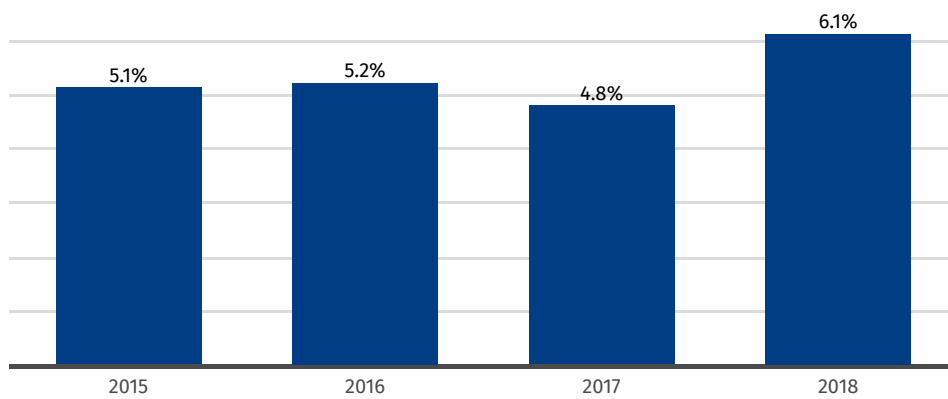


### 5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age



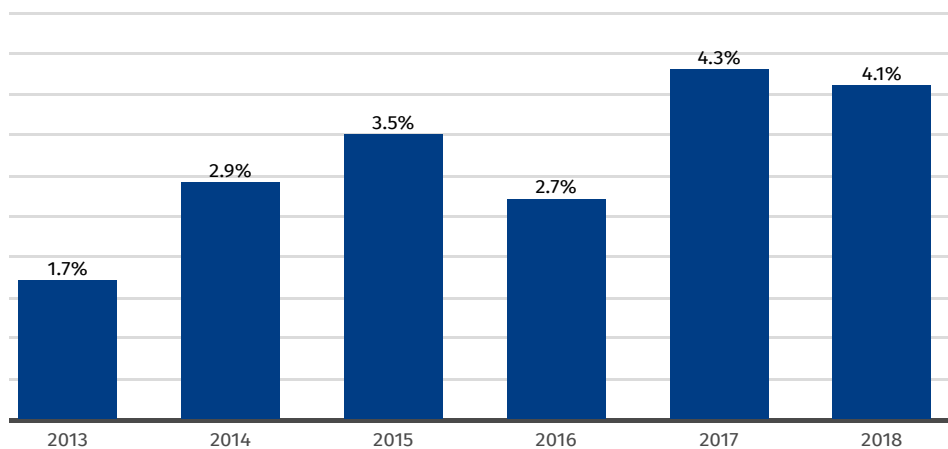
The office of the National Commissioner of Police collects data pertaining to this indicator and has done so since 2015. The data is based on an annual survey of experience of crime by women and girls 15 years of age and older in the past year and attitudes to the police. The year indicated is the survey year, but the question refers to the previous year. In 2018, 6.1% of women had experienced domestic violence in the past year.

**Figure 16. Percentage of partnered women and girls aged 15 and over experiencing physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner during the previous 12 months.**



**5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence**

**Figure 17. Percentage of women and girls aged 15 and over who had been a victim of a sexual offence in the past year**



The office of the National Commissioner of Police collects data pertaining to this indicator. The data is based on an annual survey of experience of crime by women and girls 15 years of age and older in the past year and attitudes to the police. The year indicated is the survey year, but the question refers to the previous year. The data does not permit separation of incidents concerning partners/former partners and the replies therefore the answers apply to all sexual violence. In 2018, 4.1% of girls and women over the age of 15 had experienced sexual violence.

**5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location**

There is no internationally comparable data on all aspects of this indicator; however, there is a report of the Ministry of Welfare’s action group from 2015 and a survey on the work of family members of disabled people. According to the report, unpaid men’s work amounts to 9 hours per week and women’s to 13.5 hours per week.



**5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments**

Statistics Iceland publishes statistics on elected representatives, both to the parliament (Althingi) and to local authorities. The proportion of women in Althingi has increased in recent decades and after the 2016 election it was 47.6%, the highest ever. However, in the 2017 election the percentage dropped again to 38.1%.

The proportion of women in local government has also increased in recent decades. After the 2014 local government elections, the ratio was 44%. The trend in local authorities has been similar with the exception that the percentage of female representatives has grown more evenly than in Althingi. In 2018, women account for about 47% of elected representatives in local government.



Figure 18. *Elected members of parliament (Althingi) by gender.*

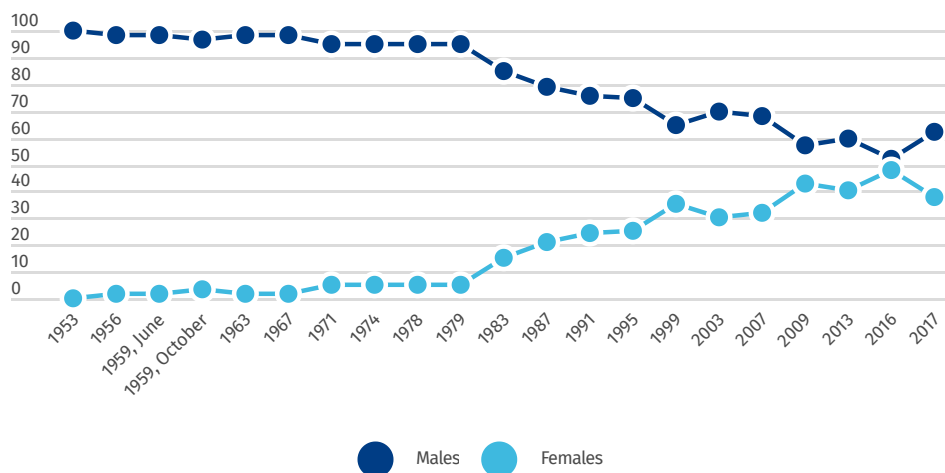
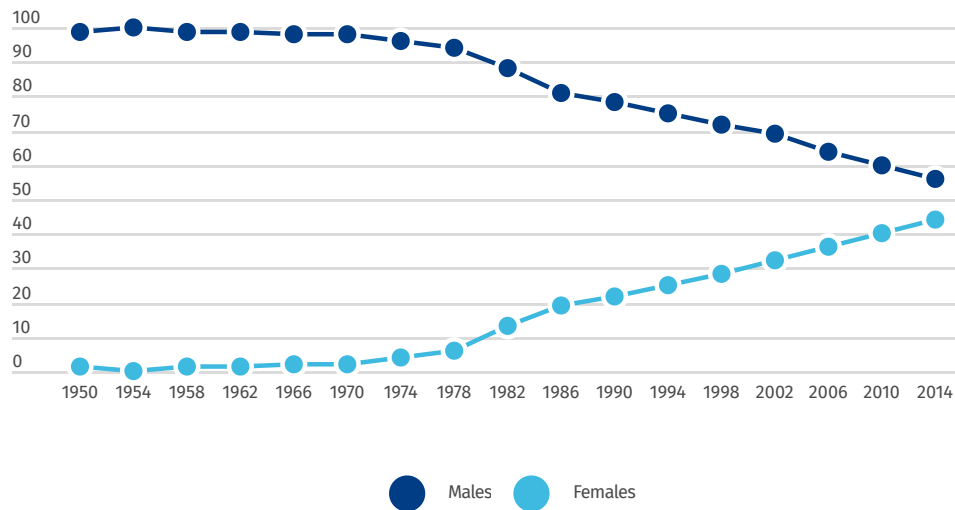




Figure 19. **Elected members of local government by gender.**



**5.6.2 Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education**



The Act on Counselling and Education on Sex and Childbirth and on Abortion and Sterilisation, No. 25/1975, provides for counselling and education regarding sex and childbirth.



**GOAL 6 – Clean water and sanitation**

For SDG 6 there are seven targets, measured by a total of eleven indicators. Methodology has been defined for all criteria. Of the indicators that are based on defined methodologies, three concern data that is not collected on a regular basis at present. It was concluded that two indicators are not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for three indicators.

**6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services**

Data on the indicator is not systematically collected but the probability is that the proportion is 100%.



**6.2.1 Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water**

Data on the indicator is not systematically collected but the probability is that the proportion is 100%.



### 6.3.1 Proportion of wastewater safely treated

74% of sewage undergoes sewage treatment where some sort of cleansing takes place (Summary of sewage treatment in Iceland in 2014. September 2017, 2nd version).



## GOAL 7 – Affordable and clean energy

For SDG 7 there are five targets, measured by a total of six indicators. Of these, one lacks a defined methodology. Data is available for four indicators.

### 7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity

### 7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology

The National Energy Authority does not have accessible figures on these criteria, but the percentage is likely 100%. In the global database Global Tracking Framework (GTF), which is referred to in UN metadata, the ratio is 100% in both cases.

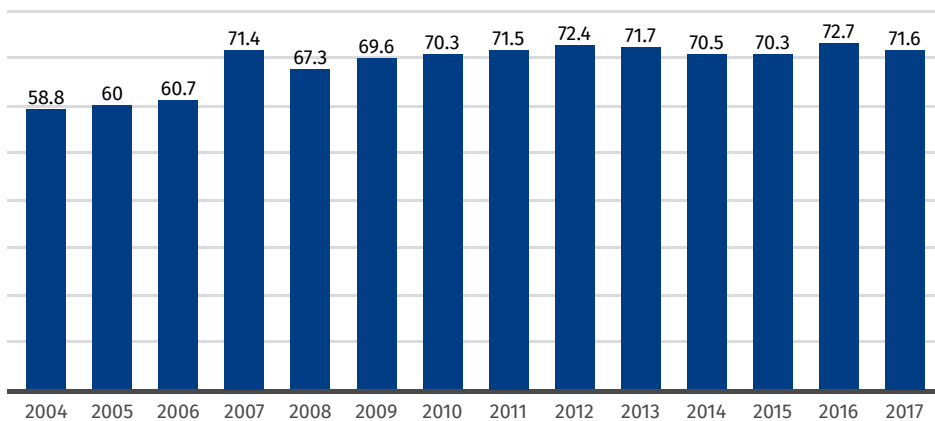


### 7.2.1 Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption

According to data from the National Energy Authority, which Eurostat maintains, the proportion was 71.57% in 2017.



Figure 20. *Share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption*

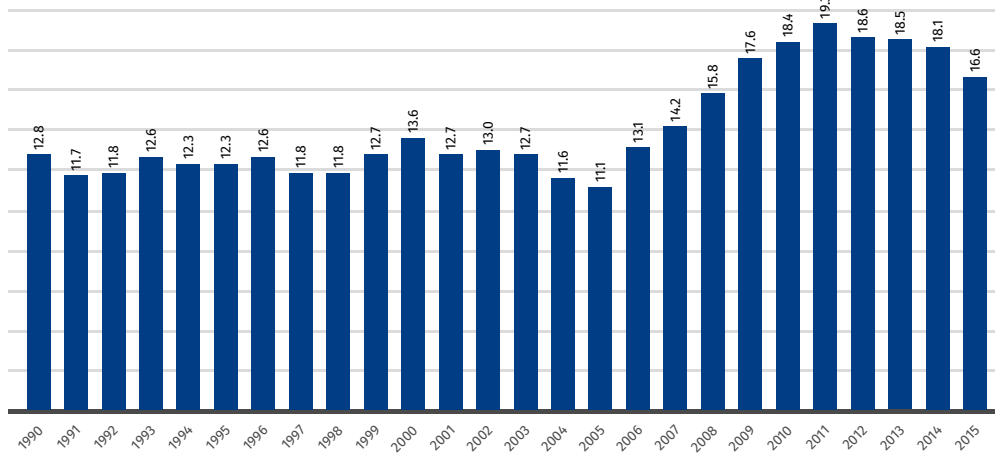


### 7.3.1 Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP

The National Energy Authority does not have accessible figures on this indicator. In the global database Global Tracking Framework, which is referred to in UN metadata, the figure was 16.56 MJ in 2015.



Figure 21. **Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP (in MJ)**



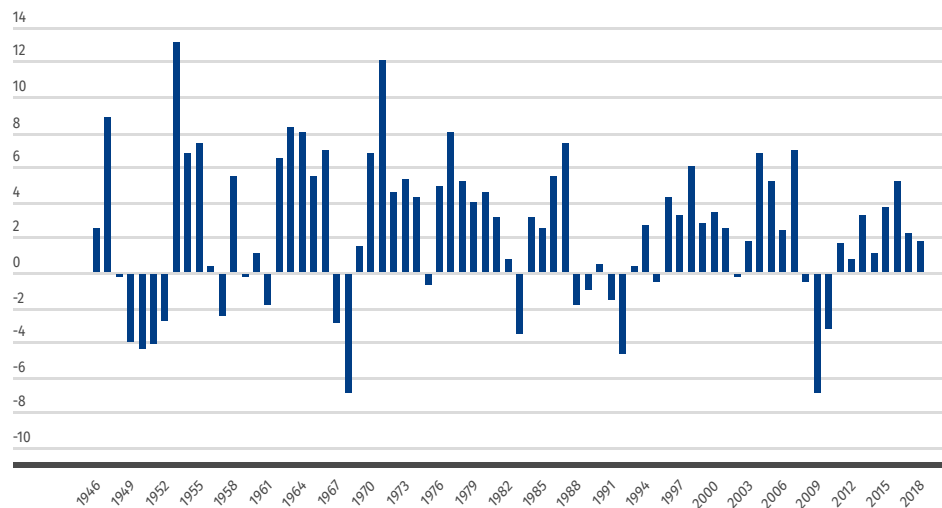
## GOAL 8 – Decent work and economic growth

For SDG 8 there are twelve targets, measured by a total of 17 indicators. Of these, one is still without a defined methodology. It was concluded that one indicator is not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for seven indicators.

### 8.1.1. Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita



Figure 22. **GDP per capita 1946-2017, volume change from the previous year**



Statistics Iceland collects data and publishes figures on GDP. Iceland’s GDP has been quite volatile, with rapid growth periods and sharp contractions. The last sharp contraction was between 2008 and 2010 and was greatest in 2009 when GDP per capita fell by 6.5%. Since then, the nation’s situation has been improving, and in 2016 GDP per capita rose by 6%. There was a slight slowdown in 2017 when the increase was 1.7%.

### 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

Statistics Iceland measures unemployment. The employment situation in Iceland has generally been good compared to that of neighbouring countries, as the employment participation rate for both genders is high and unemployment has been rather low and short-lived except for limited periods. Unemployment last increased substantially following the financial collapse, rising from 2.3% on an annual basis in 2007 to 7.6% in 2010, but has steadily declined since and by 2018 the unemployment rate was 2.7%. Young people are always at increased risk of unemployment. The unemployment rate of 16-24 year-olds peaked at just over 16% in the wake of the collapse, then declined sharply and in 2018 had fallen to 6.1%.



Figure 23. Unemployment by age, 1991-2018

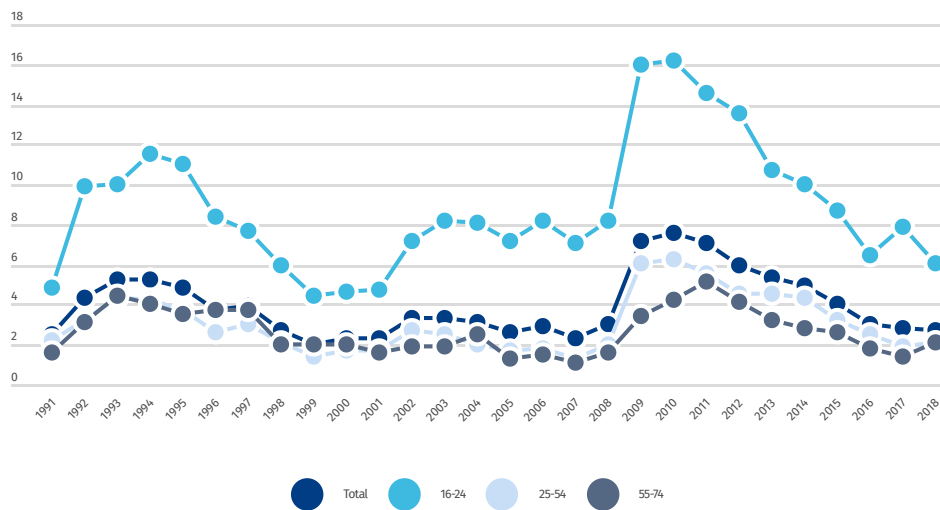
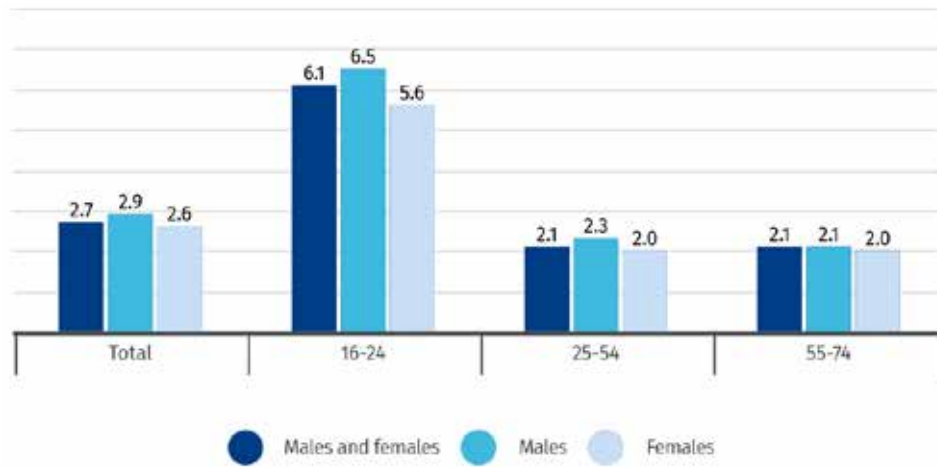


Figure 24. **Unemployment by sex and age, 2018**

### 8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training

This measure is based on the European Labour Market Survey conducted by Statistics Iceland for Iceland. In 2018, the proportion of young people aged 15-24 in Iceland who were not in education, employment or vocational training was the second lowest in Europe, or 4.9% compared to 10.5% on average in EU countries. The proportion rose sharply around the time of the financial collapse, from 4% in 2007 to 7.7% in 2009, but has since declined. On the other hand, the collapse reversed the gender ratio. In 2004-2008, the percentage was usually higher for women than for men, but after 2008 it was higher for men right up until 2017 when the percentages were practically equal.



Figure 25. **Proportion of young people aged 15-24 years not in education, employment or training (NEET) by sex**

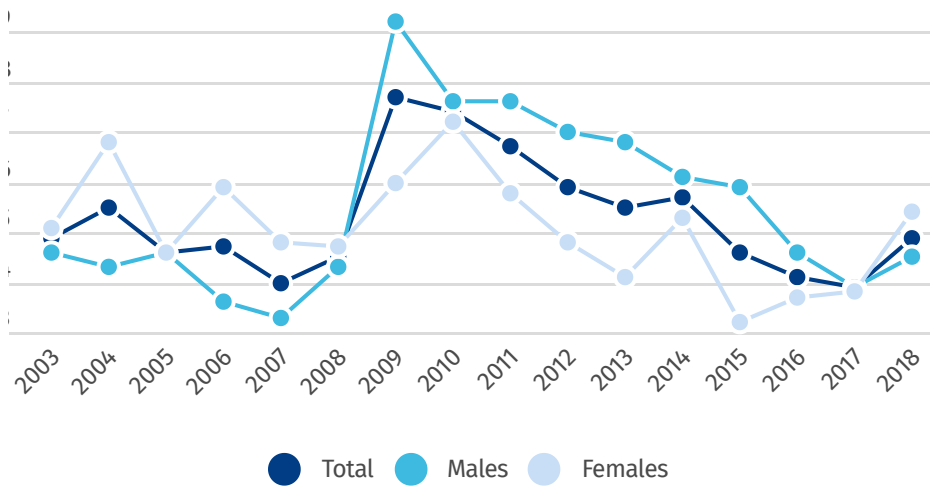
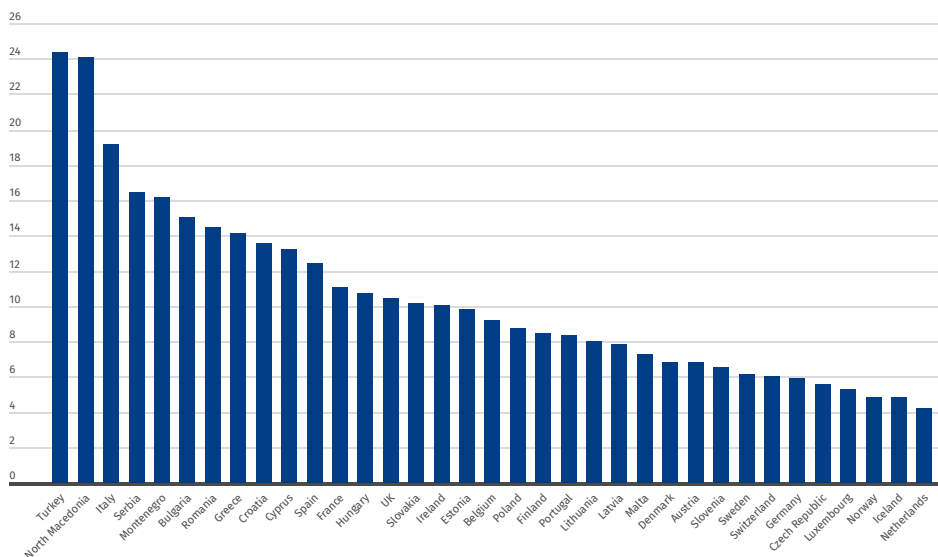


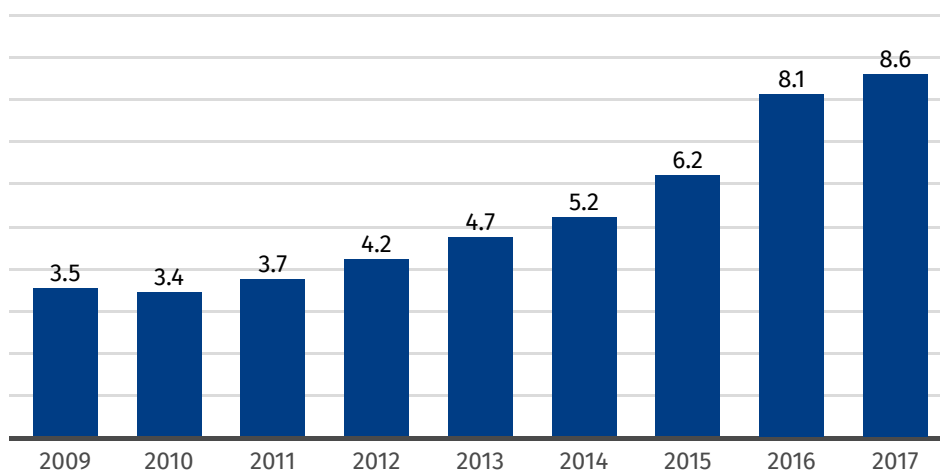
Figure 26. **Proportion of young people aged 15-24 years not in education, employment or training in Europe 2018.**



### 8.9.1 Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate

Indicator 8.9.1. deals with the proportional contribution of tourism to GDP. It has increased from 3.5% in 2009 to 8.6% in 2017.



Figure 27. **Tourism as a percentage of GDP 2009-2016**

#### 8.10.1 (a) Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults and (b) number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults

Confirmed data exists in part for this indicator. According to the IMF Financial Survey, there were 35.6 bank branches per 100,000 population in 2016. At year-end 2015, there were 194 ATMs and 82 bank branches nationwide, according to information from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.



#### 8.10.2. Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider

Data on the indicator is not systematically collected but the probability is that the proportion is almost 100%.

#### 8.a.1 Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements

According to information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Iceland's contribution was USD 6.6 million in 2015.



## GOAL 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure

For SDG 9 there are eight targets measured by a total of twelve indicators. All have a defined methodology. Data is available for six indicators.

#### 9.1.1. Proportion of the rural population who live within 2 km of an all-season road

According to Ministry of Transport and Local Government almost the entire population lives within 2 km of an all-season road. The 0.02% who do not enjoy subsidised airplane or ferry transport.



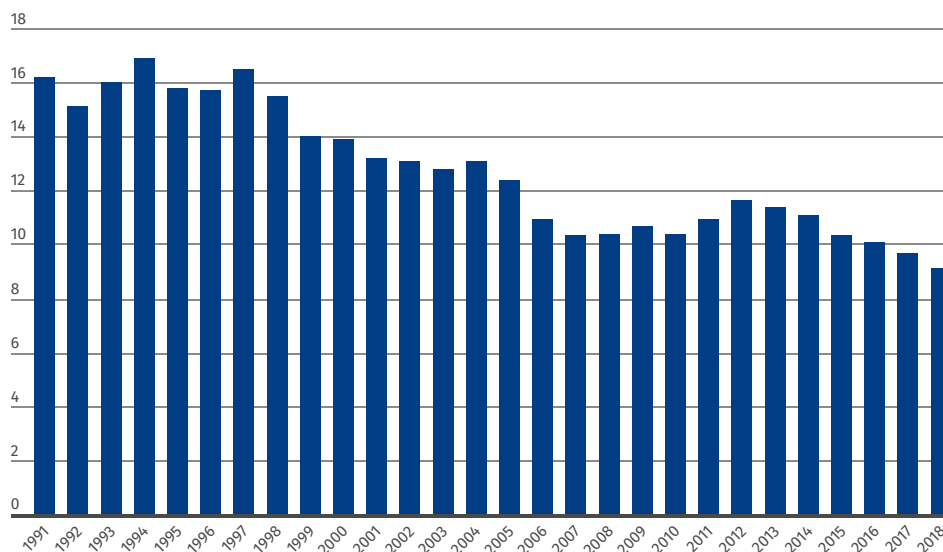


### 9.2.2 Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment

This information is collected as part of Statistics Iceland’s Labour Market Survey. The proportion of people employed in manufacturing as their main occupation as a proportion of total employment has decreased from 16.2% in 1991 to 9.9% in 2017. The change is due to a reduction in the number of manufacturing jobs by 3,100 jobs, while the number of jobs in general increased during the same period.



Figure 28. **Proportion employed in manufacturing as their main occupation 1991-2017**

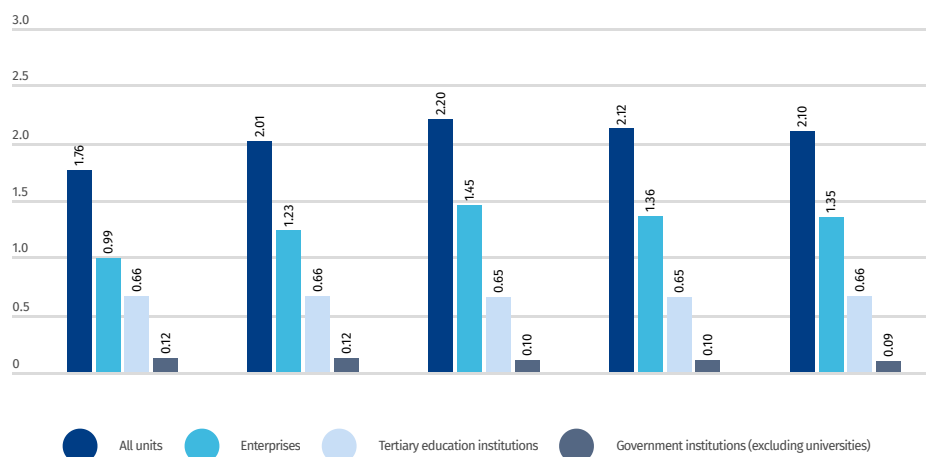


### 9.5.1 Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP

Statistics Iceland maintains data on R&D expenditure and has done so since 2013. Such expenditure as a percentage of GDP was 1.76% in 2013 and 2.1% in 2017.



Figure 29. **Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP**



## 9.5.2 Researchers (in full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants

In 2017, there were 2050 full-time equivalent positions in research in enterprises, public institutions and universities.

### 9.a.1 Total official international support (official development assistance plus other official flows) to infrastructure

In 2017, 20% of public development assistance was to infrastructure. There is no information on other capital flows of this type.



### 9.c.1 Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology

In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2018 99,96% of the population was covered by a mobile phone network, 99,99% by a 3G network, and 99,85% by a 4G network, according to the Ministry of Transport and Local Government.



## GOAL 10 – Reduced inequalities

For SDG 10 there are ten targets measured by a total of eleven indicators. All have a defined methodology. It was concluded that one indicator is not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for one indicator.

### 10.b.1 Total resource flows for development, by recipient and donor countries and type of flow (e.g. official development assistance, foreign direct investment and other flows)

According to information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, information is available on the funding for public development assistance, which is 0.29% of GDP, but not on other capital flows.



## GOAL 11 – Sustainable cities and communities

For SDG 11 there are ten targets, measured by a total of 15 indicators. Of these, four lack a defined methodology. Data is available for two indicators.

### 11.2.1. Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

According to the Ministry of Transport and Local Government 95% of the population has access to public transport where they live. Furthermore, local governments provide transportation services for the disabled and the elderly. Children who live far away from their school are provided with transport to and from school.



### 11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities

Since 2002, all residents of Iceland are considered to benefit from waste collection and in that context it should be borne in mind that the obligation of local authorities with regard to the collection and transport of household waste (refuse) is clear, cf. Art. 8 of Act No. 55/2003, on Handling of Waste. In 2016, the total amount of waste was 1,071,951 tonnes. Of the total volume, 78.6% was recycled, while 21.4% was discharged, which means that the recovery rate rose by 2.5 percentage points.



## GOAL 12 – Responsible consumption and production

For SDG 12 there are eleven targets, measured by a total of 13 indicators. In total, seven out of thirteen metrics lack a defined methodology. Data is available for two indicators.

### 12.4.1 Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement

Iceland is a party to some of these agreements, but not to the “Rotterdam Convention” and therefore Iceland does not fulfil all the conditions for this indicator.



### 12.5.1 National recycling rate, tons of material recycled

In 2016, the total amount of waste was 1,071,951 tonnes. Of the total volume, 78.6% was recycled, while 21.4% was discharged, which means that the recovery rate rose by 2.5 percentage points.



## GOAL 13 – Climate action

For SDG 13 there are five targets measured by a total of eight indicators. Of these, five lack a defined methodology. No data is available for these indicators.



## GOAL 14 – Life below water

For SDG 14 there are ten targets measured by ten indicators. Of these, three lack a defined methodology. Data is available for two indicators.

### 14.4.1 Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels

Reports on the status of commercial fish stocks are available for nineteen fish stocks at the Marine Research Institute. These reports indicate whether fishing mortality rates are higher than the limit for sustainable utilisation. The percentage within biologically sustainable levels is around 90%.



### 14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas

According to information from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, the official figure for Iceland is 0.05% and this is reported to international parties.



## GOAL 15 – Life on land

For SDG 15 there are twelve targets measured by a total of thirteen indicators (fourteen in total including one which is repeated). Three indicators lack a defined methodology. Data is available for one indicator.

### 15.1.1 Forest area as a proportion of total land area

In 2018, this was 2% and has increased in recent decades.



## GOAL 16 – Peace, Justice and strong institutions

For SDG 16 there are twelve targets, measured by a total of 23 indicators. Of these, one indicator lacks a defined methodology. It was concluded that one indicator is not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for six indicators.

### 16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age

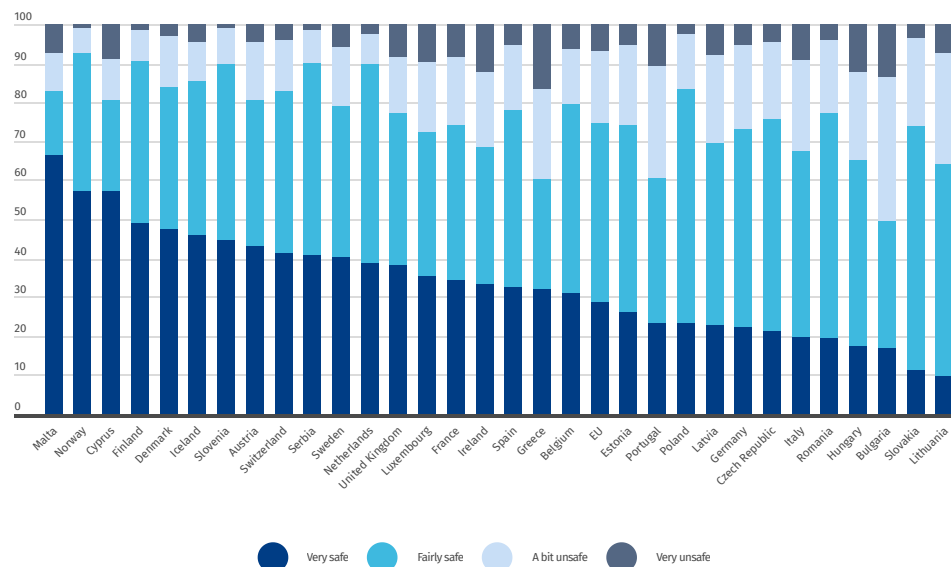
This information is obtained from the case files of the National Commissioner of Police. In the years 2007-2018, the number of intentional homicides ranged from zero to three per year. The number of murders per 100,000 population was therefore from 0 to 0.9. During this period women were about one-third of victims of intentional homicides. Homicide is too rare to give a breakdown by the age distribution of victims.



### 16.1.4 Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live

Data for the scale can be found in the Appendix to the EU-Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2013, which is prepared by Statistics Iceland. It can be seen that 85.5% of the population felt very or fairly safe, and 46.1% felt very safe. Iceland has the sixth-highest proportion of those EU countries that participated in the 2013 SILC, regardless of whether this is measured by those who considered themselves very or fairly safe, or just those who felt very safe. The average for EU countries is 74.7%.

Figure 30. **Feeling of security when alone outdoors in the vicinity of home at night, 2013.**

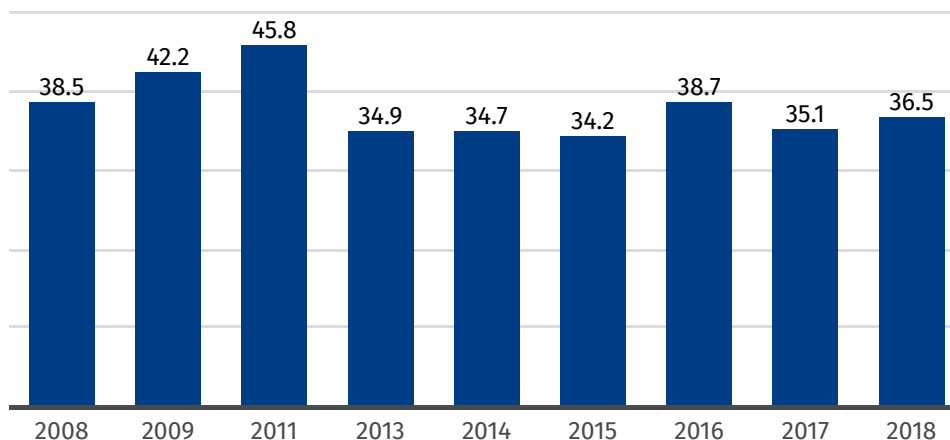


### 16.3.1 Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms

The National Commissioner of Police gathers this information through an annual survey of the nation’s experience of crime in the past year and attitudes to the police. Data for the years 2010 and 2012 is not available. The proportion was highest in 2011, at 45.8%, and lowest in 2015, at 34.2%. In 2018 the proportion was 36.5%. However, it must be borne in mind that these proportions are based on a very small group, as only 2.1-3.9% of the respondents in the surveys said they had been subjected to violence in the past year.



Figure 31. **Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimisation to the police**



**16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age**

The birth of all children in Iceland is registered by the public sector in the Register of Births of the Directorate of Health.



**16.10.1 Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months**

There are no exact figures available, but the number can be expected to be close to zero.

**16.10.2 Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information**

In Iceland, this right is guaranteed by the Information Act, No. 14/2012.



## GOAL 17 – Partnerships for the goals

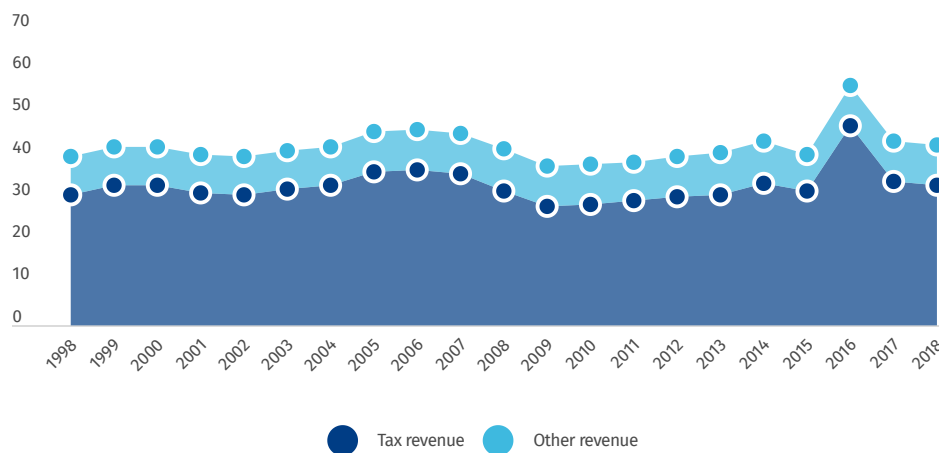
For SDG 17 there are 19 targets, measured by a total of 25 indicators. Six indicators lack a defined methodology. It was concluded that seven indicators are not applicable to Iceland. Data is available for eight indicators.

### 17.1.1 Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source

This information is from Statistics Iceland’s data on public finances. The data is broken down according to the Government Finance Statistics Manual (GFSM) framework of the IMF into four main sources of revenue; i.e. tax revenue, social contributions, grants and other income. In 2017, state revenue amounted to 43.4% of GDP, while tax revenue amounted to 34.2% of GDP. The year 2016 differs somewhat from other years, as the state’s revenue was a considerably higher proportion of GDP than in the preceding and subsequent years. This is due to the fact that the “stability contribution”, arising from settlement of the estates of failed banks, was recognised as a financial income tax in the national accounts.



Figure 32. **Government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source**



### 17.2.1. Net official development assistance, total and to least developed countries, as a proportion of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee donors’ gross national income (GNI)

According to information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the total percentage was 0.29% of GNI in 2016, and the proportion going to poorest countries was 0.08%.



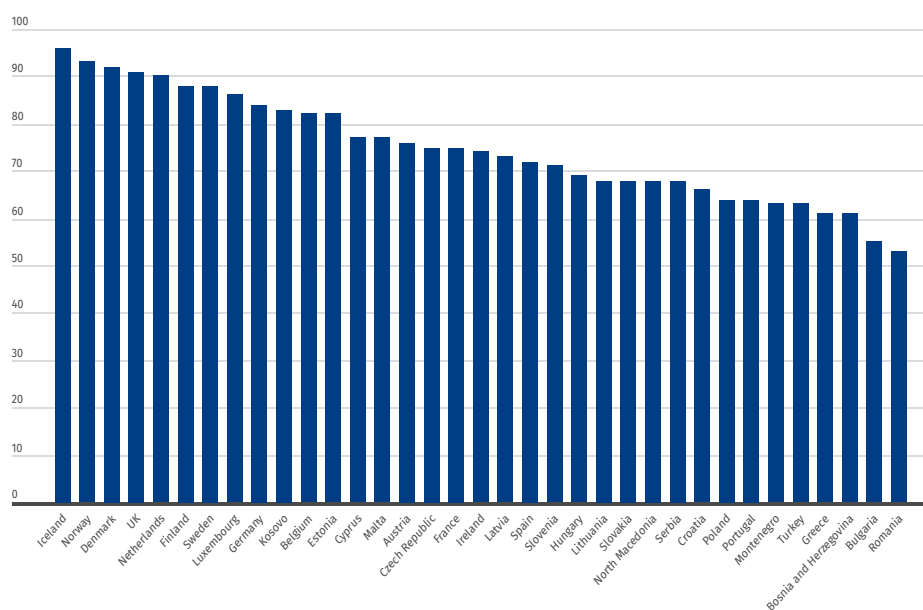


### 17.8.1. Proportion of individuals using the Internet

The target is focused on developing countries. The indicator concerns the proportion of residents using the Internet. Statistics Iceland collects these data as part of statistical collaboration on the Eurostat Information Society Indicators. The results can be found, for instance, on the Eurostat website. Internet use is very widespread in Iceland, as in 2018 96% of the population 16 years of age and older used the Internet daily, which is the highest proportion in Europe.



Figure 33. **Percentage of people aged 16 and over using the Internet daily, 2018**



### 17.9.1 Dollar value of financial and technical assistance (including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation) committed to developing countries

The indicator focuses on aid to developing countries, and it is pointed out that the aid is related to the development of skills to implement national plans. Iceland provides funds for general skills development through the UNU Training Programmes. This is covered under indicator 4.b.1.



### 17.18.2 Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Act No. 163/2007, on Statistics Iceland and Official Statistics, complies with the fundamental principles of official statistics.



**17.18.3 Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding**

Such a plan does not exist in Iceland.

**17.19.1 Dollar value of all resources made available to strengthen statistical capacity in developing countries**

This is not an emphasis of Iceland's international development cooperation.

**17.19.2 Proportion of countries that (a) have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years; and (b) have achieved 100% birth registration and 80% death registration**

Iceland fulfils all three conditions listed. A census was taken in 2011 and all births and deaths are recorded.





