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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Fifth periodic report submitted by Iceland under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2017*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. Iceland has, in keeping with Articles 16 and 17 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, prepared its fifth periodic report on the implementation of the Covenant. The report follows the guidelines of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter ‘the Committee’) issued in 2009. The report covers the period from 2010 to the spring of 2021 and aims to provide an accurate picture of the implementation of the Covenant during that period and how the Committee’s Concluding Observations from 11 December 2012 have been implemented. They will be referred to in this report by their corresponding numbers.

2. The Governmental steering committee on human rights, composed of representatives of all Ministries, supervised the preparation of the report. Quality consultation with interested parties was sought during the preparation of the report. In the spring of 2019, the steering committee held a general consultation meeting with the Icelandic Human Rights Centre and various civil society organisations to discuss the human rights situation. Additionally, in the spring of 2020, representatives of the committee met with the Director of the Human Rights Centre to discuss the upcoming report. In August 2020, information on the reporting was published on the Government’s consultation portal, where anyone was able to submit comments. The upcoming report was also discussed in a meeting of the Welfare Watch in the autumn of 2020 and a request was made for a contribution from that meeting. The draft report was then published through the Government’s consultation portal in April 2021.

II. General observations

A. The Constitution and other legislation

Response to paragraph 4 of the Concluding Observations E/C.12/ISL/CO/4

3. For coverage of the human rights provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland No 33/1944, refer to Iceland’s previous reports to the Committee.

4. In its latest concluding observations the Committee made observations regarding the Constitutional Council’s Bill for a new constitutional law. The Bill was submitted to Althingi in November 2012 with specific amendments, but no conclusion was reached. No specific amendments to the human rights provisions of the Constitution are planned, but in keeping with the procedures of constitutional review it is, however, envisaged that they will be reviewed in the period of 2021–2025. Economic, social and cultural rights are protected by the current Constitution and various provisions of Icelandic legislation, which will be covered in more detail in connection with the discussion on individual Articles.

5. The Covenant does not have the force of law in Iceland, since rather than incorporating human rights conventions into the legal order in their entirety, the tradition is to adapt domestic legislation to these conventions. However, two human rights conventions have been given the force of law in Iceland, i.e. the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, via Act No 62/1994, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, via Act No 19/2013. For coverage of the effects of the Covenant on the implementation of laws, please refer to Iceland’s previous reports.

B. International obligations

Response to paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Concluding Observations

6. Several conventions concerning human rights have been ratified by Iceland since the last report was submitted. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by Althingi in 2016. A number of Council of Europe conventions have also been ratified, including the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) and the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

(the Istanbul Convention). Work has begun on the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families has not been ratified, but many of the Convention's provisions have already been incorporated into Icelandic legislation.

7. In its latest concluding observations, the Committee recommended that Iceland consider ratifying the optional Protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The decision has been made to not ratify the Protocol for the time being.

C. Local human rights monitoring

Response to paragraph 7 of the Concluding Observations

8. There is no independent human rights organisation in Iceland that fulfils the UN's Paris Principles. The Ministry of Justice has been working to establish such an organisation in the last few years but no allowance for such an organisation was made in the fiscal plan for the period of 2021 to 2025. A working group was established in 2021 to seek ways to establish such an organisation.

9. The Icelandic Human Rights Centre has partially functioned as an independent national human rights organisation. At the end of 2019, the Ministry of Justice's subsidy to the Centre was doubled in order to create a more solid basis for the running of the Centre and to enable it to carry out its role.

10. A special Government steering committee on human rights was established in 2017, with representatives from every ministry. This steering committee is a consultation forum that serves the objective of ensuring stability in the working processes and involvement of all the ministries in human rights affairs. The Committee's tasks include following up on the recommendations and observations of international human rights regulatory bodies.

III. Information regarding individual provisions of the Covenant

Article 1 – The right of self-determination

11. No changes concerning the right of self-determination have been made since the last report.

Article 2 – Non-discrimination

Response to paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Concluding Observations

Gradual introduction of rights

12. A special Welfare Watch was set up in 2009, composed of representatives of the State, municipalities and various interest groups. (See E/C.12/ISL/4, 133–134). The original role of the Welfare Watch was to monitor the social and financial effects of the economic collapse on families. The Welfare Watch was reinstated in 2014 and its primary task is looking after the welfare of underprivileged families with children, especially single parents and their children, and to gather information about the living conditions of those who live in dire poverty, with the aim of reducing it.

Equality and non-discrimination

13. As stated in Iceland's previous reports (E/1994/104/Add.25, point 16, and E/1990/6/Add.15, 9–13), Article 65 of the Constitution provides for the general principle of equality.

14. The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender No 150/2020 was adopted in 2020, replacing the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men No

10/2008. The objective of the Act is to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender and to institute and maintain equality between women and men and equal opportunities for the genders in all spheres of society. In the Act, the term 'gender' refers to women, men and persons whose gender is registered as neutral in Registers Iceland, unless specifically stated otherwise, and this is the first-time gender equality laws refer to other genders than women and men. Additionally, this is the first time a provision on multiple discrimination is included, i.e. when an individual is subjected to discrimination on the basis of more than one reason for discrimination that protection is provided against by the equality legislation.

15. The Act on the Administration of Matters Concerning Equality No 151/2020 was adopted in 2020. Its objective is to reinforce the administration of this policy area; it applies to the Directorate of Equality and the Equal Rights Complaints Committee.

16. The Act on Equal Treatment on the Labour Market No 86/2018 entered into force in 2018. The Act applies to equal treatment of individuals on the labour market, irrespective of their race, ethnic origin, religion, life stance, disability, reduced working capacity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual characteristics and gender expression, for example as regards access to jobs, self-employment or occupational sectors, including as regards recruitment and promotion; access to educational and vocational counselling, vocational education and training; decisions in connection with wages, other terms of service and notice of termination; and participation in workers' and employers' organisations, including the perquisites that they provide to their members. The Act on Equal Treatment Irrespective of Race and Ethnic Origin No 85/2018 entered into force at the same time. That Act applies to all spheres of society other than the labour market. The Act prohibits discrimination, e.g. in relation to social protection, i.e. health and social services, in relation to access to the social security scheme and other social schemes, such as the unemployment insurance and maternity leave scheme, schools and pedagogical establishments, as well as discrimination in relation to access and delivery of goods and services. The Prime Minister has been preparing a Bill that also applies to equal treatment irrespective of religion, life stance, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual characteristics or gender expression in all fields of society, with the exception of the labour market.

17. The Act on Gender Autonomy No 80/2019 was adopted in 2019. That Act provides for the right of individuals to define their own gender and thereby aims to guarantee the recognition of the gender identity of each person. The Act was a response to new and changed attitudes towards the official registration of gender and a legal reform of the rights of transgender and intersex persons. Further legal amendments have been made e.g. lowering the age criterion to change the official registration of gender from 18 to 15, banning unnecessary surgical procedures on children who are born with atypical sex characteristics, and amendments to various laws to ensure the legal rights of people with a gender neutral registration and those of transgender people, including the Children Act in order to ensure the rights of parents who have changed their gender registration.

Rights of persons with disabilities

18. The Act on Services for People with Disabilities that have Long-term Support Needs No 38/2018 was adopted in 2018. The Act sets out the clear objective that people with disabilities should be offered the best services that can be given at any time to meet their specific support needs. The service shall be aimed at giving people with disabilities the support necessary to fully enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others, and to enable them to lead their lives independently on their own terms. It is specifically stated that when implementing the Act, the international obligations Iceland has entered into shall be enforced, especially the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the Act, people with disabilities are ensured rights conforming to their needs and preferences, as well as access to social services that make it possible for them to live in their own homes and promote their full adaptation to and participation in society. Additionally, the provisions of the Planning and Building Act, the Housing Act and the Public Rental Dwellings Act, apply to housing for people with disabilities. People with disabilities have the right to decide their place of residence and where and with whom they live, on an equal basis with others. Services for people with disabilities shall not be conditional upon a particular living arrangement. The interim provisions of the Act state that people with disabilities who

are now living in institutions or have rooms in group homes shall be offered other housing options. For further information regarding the rights of people with disabilities and the implementation of the aforementioned Act, reference is made to Iceland's first report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

19. Icelandic legislation requires that high-quality education shall be offered without discrimination at all educational levels, regardless of disabilities or any other conditions. See commentary on Articles 13 and 14.

Article 3 – Gender equality

Response to paragraph 8 of the Concluding Observations

20. The Icelandic authorities place a considerable emphasis on gender equality. The gender equality policy area was transferred to the Prime Minister's Office in 2019, in order to promote gender and equality mainstreaming within the administration.

21. The Government's Gender Equality Action Plan was adopted in 2019. It is intended to define the role of the authorities at any given time and describe projects that entail direct measures to increase gender equality. The Gender Equality Action Plan Dashboard was promoted through the Government's website at the end of 2020. Its objective is to follow-up on the action taken.

22. The gender pay gap has been reduced: in 2008 the unadjusted pay difference was 20.5% but in 2020 it was 12.6%. The adjusted gender pay gap was 6.6% in 2008 but in 2020 it was 4.1%.

23. A law was adopted in 2018 in which special provision was made for equal pay certification. The aim of equal pay certification is to ensure equal pay for equal work and thus fight against gender-based pay differences. The Act obliges enterprises and institutions employing 25 or more to acquire equal pay certification. The certification is based on a standard, and by implementing it, companies and institutions can establish an administration system that ensures that the procedure and determination of pay matters is based on objective viewpoints and does not entail gender-based discrimination. An accredited certification body shall evaluate whether all the requirements have been fulfilled and whether pay certification equal can be granted. The implementation is carried out in phases, with 321 companies and institutions having received equal pay certification on 29 September 2021. The equal pay certification reaches 62% of the employees it was intended to reach. Additionally, at the end of 2020, the Prime Minister appointed a working group to re-evaluate the worth of jobs where women are in the majority.

24. The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on equal pay for men and women that was submitted by Iceland, in cooperation with several other States, in the summer of 2019. The resolution inter alia provides for a special UN day dedicated to equal pay for men and women and the first Equal Pay Day was celebrated on 18 September 2020.

25. The Directorate of Equality handles administration in the field of equality legislation. The Act on the Administration of Matters Concerning Equality expands the tasks of the Directorate and clarifies its authorisation to levy per diem fines in relation to violations of the equality laws. The Directorate can levy per diem fines against parties that do not submit information, do not follow instructions to make amends in keeping with the ruling of the Equal Rights Complaints Committee, do not set themselves an equality plan, or do not take the requisite measures in relation to equal pay certification.

26. Gender mainstreaming in public policy development and decision-making within the public sector has been given the force of law. This has mainly been implemented through gender budgeting. Work is under way to promote other aspects and one of the main tasks of the Government's Gender Equality Action Plan is to draw up and adopt a comprehensive plan on gender mainstreaming in the policy development and decision-making of ministries and Government institutions.

27. Gender budgeting was given the force of law with the Public Finance Act No 123/2015. It entails recognising the inherent incentives and effects of the State's revenue-

raising and spending on the situation and opportunities available to the genders, in order to be able to enhance equality and improve and inform decision-making. Each year's draft budget includes explanations of the effects of the main allocations on gender equality. A basic report on gender budgeting is issued annually, mapping out the gender considerations and the gender situation within every public policy area. It also includes an overview of the Government's gender equality focus areas and the report as a whole is used as the basis for setting goals in the five-year fiscal plan and for evaluating the effects of the State's revenue-raising and spending on gender equality.

28. In recent years, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has placed an emphasis on increasing the percentage of women in influential positions within the Ministry, and although there is still room for improvement, considerable strides have already been made in that direction. In December 2020, four of the Ministry's seven Directorates are headed by women, including, for the first time, the Directorate for Security and Defence. Women fill a third of ambassadorial positions and out of a total of 17 posted ambassadors, 7 are women. Since August 2019, the majority of ambassadors to Iceland's bilateral embassies have been women; however it is still necessary to increase the percentage of women ambassadors. In the years to come, an emphasis will be placed on reaching a better balance within the diplomatic service in this regard.

29. The courts of law have, in keeping with the provisions of the equality laws, set themselves an equality plan which lays out how to ensure equality among their employees. In 2020 there were a total of 42 district court judges, of which 17 were women. The percentage of women district court judges is therefore about 40%. Landsréttur began its operations on 1 January 2018, in keeping with the Act on Courts No 50/2016. Landsréttur is a court of appeal and its creation has brought about extensive changes to the Icelandic legal system. Some 15 judges serve at Landsréttur, of which 6 are women, or 40%. The Supreme Court now has seven judges, of which three are women, or around 43%.

30. The current Gender Equality Action Plan includes a measure intended to improve the position of women within the academic community. The plan is to examine the reasons for women's withdrawal from scientific work, as well as the reasons why men generally receive more academic promotions in the field of science than women, by examining the universities' promotion systems in the context of family situations and career choices. An action programme is to be drawn up based on the results.

Gender-based violence

31. Various measures have been made to negate gender-based violence since Iceland submitted the last report, including in relation to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

32. An action plan on the processing of sexual offences within the justice administration system was adopted in 2017. A steering group on comprehensive improvements with regard to sexual violence was established on the basis of the plan. One of its main roles was to submit recommendations on legislative amendments with the aim of reinforcing the position of victims all over the country. The group was also intended to spearhead the Government's coordinated efforts in the fight against all kinds of gender-based violence. The group has, inter alia, written a report containing recommendations on the review of the law and its implementation to improve the legal position of victims.

33. The group wrote the report #metoo and the Government Offices of Iceland as a Workplace. The report is based on a review of surveys that have been made on the extent of gender-based and sexual harassment within the Government Offices, of plans that are intended to counteract and react to such behaviour, meetings with outside professionals and meetings with gender equality officers, security guards and employees' safety representatives of all the ministries. The group also held an international conference on the effects of the #metoo movement in 2019.

34. In 2019, a memorandum was drawn up on digital gender-based violence, which included recommendations on legal amendments, information and continuing education within the justice administration system, as well as risk prevention. The steering group organised a forum on digital sexual violence in connection with this work, in 2019. The memorandum was then presented to the Government and the decision made to entrust the

Minister of Justice with reviewing the legislation and its implementation. The Ministry of Social Affairs will examine the recommendations for improved services for victims in connection with the implementation of a plan on measures against violence and its consequences.

35. A plan on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment was adopted in 2020. By adopting the plan, Althingi entrusted the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, the Minister of Social Affairs and Children and the Minister of Health with establishing organised preventive measures against sexual and gender-based violence and harassment. The preventive measures shall be integrated into teaching and school activities at all school levels and shall be implemented by after-school activity and youth centres, in sports and youth activities and other recreational activities.

36. The General Penal Code No 19/1940 was amended in 2016, in order to better ensure protection against domestic violence. Article 218b of the General Penal Code now states that “whoever repeatedly or seriously threatens the life, health or welfare of their current or former spouse or registered partner, their descendant or the descendants of their current or former spouse or registered partner, or that of others residing in the same home or under their care, with violence, threats, captivity, coercion or in any other manner, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to 6 years.” A serious offence is punishable by imprisonment up to 16 years.

37. The 2016 amendment to the General Penal Code also added a provision on forced marriage to Article 225(2), which now states that if one person forces another to enter into marriage, it is punishable by an imprisonment of up to four years. The same applies to forcing another person to undergo a comparable ceremony, even if it has no legal standing.

38. An Act on Restraining Orders and Removals from the Home No 85/2011 was adopted in 2011. The main purpose of the Act was to reinforce the legal position of victims of violence, especially domestic violence. Previously, the burden of requesting a restraining order or the removal of violent persons from their home was placed on the victims, who rarely made such requests. After the new Act was adopted, the police are authorised to make decisions on restraining orders. It is not necessary to refer a decision by a police commissioner to issues a restraining order to a court of law unless the accused person requests it within two weeks of being notified of the decision. Additionally, the police are authorised to remove individuals from their homes if they are a threat to others who dwell there. Such decision shall always be referred to a court of law. The victim shall be given a designated legal representative.

39. A new penalty clause on stalking was added to the General Penal Code in 2021. The clause makes it punishable to threaten, follow, monitor, contact or, through other comparable means, stalk another person if the behaviour is repeated and conducive to causing fear or anxiety. Also adopted was the Act on the Protection of Sexual Privacy, which has the purpose of increasing protection against digital sexual violence. The Act entails, inter alia, amendments to the provisions of the General Penal Code, respectively on sexual offences and protection of privacy.

40. The cooperation project Building Bridges – Cooperation on Domestic Violence Matters aimed to share experience of using methods that have worked in the fight against violence in intimate relationships, offer information and promote awareness-raising for all people living in Iceland. The introduction of the project was carried out in cooperation between various police agencies, institutions, ministries and municipalities. Numerous information and networking meetings were held and information videos were made. This included training on how to recognise victims and perpetrators, responses and resources in connection with domestic violence, and services for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, people of foreign origins and LGBTI persons. The project ended formally in 2019, but its results, the experience gained, and the networks formed will continue to be useful in the fight against violence.

41. The Icelandic authorities have participated in the UN Women Generation Equality campaign and are among the leader States in an alliance of action that has the objective of eradicating gender-based violence. A steering group on the implementation of the campaign was established and is tasked with submitting recommendations on measures to be taken in

this policy area and to formulate the implementation thereof in cooperation with other leader States.

42. The Minister of Education, Science and Culture set in 2020 up a working group on the promotion of sex education in schools. The working group's tasks include making a recommendation on the implementation of sex education and violence prevention at the compulsory and upper secondary levels of education and carrying out a survey of the implementation of sex education in schools.

43. A parliamentary resolution on measures against violence and its consequences for the years 2019–2022 was adopted in 2019. The inter-ministerial plan covers various different types of violence and the measures cover physical, sexual and psychological violence. A special focus is put on vulnerable groups, such as immigrants, people with disabilities and elderly people. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Affairs has made an agreement with the Women's Shelter and the Icelandic Human Rights Centre on the project Know your rights, knowledge is power, which is intended to promote the dissemination of information about services and legal resources for women of foreign origin who live in Iceland and have been subjected to domestic violence.

44. The brochure Your rights – important info for immigrants in Iceland was revised in 2019. The brochure discusses the rights of people in Iceland applicable to intimate relationships and communications and includes references to further information and assistance from both institutions and civil society organisations. The brochure is available in seven languages.

Stereotypes

45. The functions of the Directorate of Equality include changing traditional views on gender and countervailing negative gender stereotypes. It is also intended to work on preventing gender-based violence, in cooperation with other authorities and organisations. In recent years, the Directorate has worked on special projects, including raising awareness about the consequences of violence and resources for sufferers thereof under the slogan You have hope and the project Break Free from Gender Stereotypes, which had the aim of breaking up the traditional gender stereotypes and gender-specific choices of education and jobs through diverse means.

46. There has been a focus on the participation of men in gender equality activities, including with the purpose of working against stereotypes about gender roles and against gender violence. The Icelandic diplomatic service has organised the Barbershop Toolbox that was developed for the UN women #HeForShe campaign. The Toolbox enables individuals, companies and others to organise Barbershop conferences, with the aim of mobilising men and boys in the fight for gender equality. The Government's Gender Equality Action Plan for the period of 2020–2023 includes a project on men and equality, which is intended to cover, respectively, the connection between gender-based and sexual harassment and ideas about masculinity, boundaries and consent.

Articles 4 and 5 – General observations about the rights conferred by the Covenant

47. No changes concerning these Articles have been made since the last report.

Article 6 – The right to work

Response to paragraphs 9 and 10 of the Concluding Observations

48. Regarding labour market legislation, please refer to Iceland's last report to the Committee (see E/C.12/ISL/4, 73–87). Various amendments have been made to the legislation since the last report was submitted. One such amendment was a change in the title of Act No 45/2007 which now bears the title Act on Posted Workers and the Obligations of Foreign Service-Providers. At the same time, amendments were made with the objective of implementing Directive 2014/67/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and

ensuring that the pay and other terms of service of temporary agency workers are in conformity with the provisions of the laws and collective pay agreements applicable to the Icelandic labour market. Various amendments have also been made to the Foreign Nationals' Right to Work Act No 97/2002, including to meet the changed needs of the labour market and the scientific community. The rule is now that all foreign nationals who receive a permanent residence permit in Iceland are exempt from the requirement to have a work permit.

49. Act No 86/2018 applies to the equal treatment of individuals on the labour market as regards access to jobs, self-employment or occupational sectors, including as regards recruitment and promotion; access to educational and vocational counselling, vocational education and training; decisions in connection with wages, other terms of service and notice of termination; and participation in workers' and employers' organisations, including the prerequisites that they provide to their members.

50. The fiscal plan for 2021–2025 states that the main objectives of the Directorate of Labour are to prevent long-term unemployment and to find suitable jobs for the long-term unemployed, for example by making agreements with companies and institutions. Increased participation in education in collaboration with the educational system is also mentioned, as well as increasing the number of people making use of rehabilitative resources. The recorded unemployment rate was around 2.1% in December 2016 and 2.2% in December 2017. The recorded unemployment rate was around 2.7% in December 2018 and 3.2% in March 2019. It is clear that COVID-19 has had a considerable effect on the labour market, as the recorded unemployment rate rose severely in 2020, and there have never been more people recorded as unemployed in Iceland than in December 2020, when the general recorded unemployment rate was 10.7%. Various temporary measures have been taken to counteract unemployment. This includes setting up the so-called partial benefits system, which enables workers and employers to temporarily agree to a reduced employment ratio, with the workers having the right to unemployment benefits alongside the reduced employment ratio, subject to certain conditions. The earnings-related period of unemployment benefits was also extended for those who lost their jobs in connection to COVID-19, and the basic unemployment benefits were raised. Additionally, the authorisation for employment seekers to pursue education while receiving unemployment benefits was extended and more money was made available for scholarships available for work-related courses. At the same time, the Directorate of Labour's authorisation to disburse unemployment benefits to employees of bankrupt companies was extended. The leeway for employers to receive grants from the Directorate of Labour to hire employment seekers was widened as well. Furthermore, changes were made to enable individuals undergoing employment-related work rehabilitation to earn the right to unemployment benefits.

51. A special international department of the Directorate of Labour was established due to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide services to that group specifically. The Directorate of Labour has also been entrusted with a bigger role in offering services to refugees and individuals who have been granted residence permits for humanitarian reasons; the Directorate will organise free Icelandic language lessons and civic education for this group.

52. Article 7 of the Foreign Nationals' Right to Work Act No 97/2002 authorises the Directorate of Labour to grant temporary work permits, subject to certain conditions. However, such work permits are only valid for work for specified employers. The reasoning behind the current arrangement is that it allows the authorities and trade unions to monitor and ensure that foreign nationals are not being discriminated against, since the specified employers are obliged to ensure compliance with the provisions of the law and collective pay agreements. It is permissible to grant a temporary work permit where appropriate for a specific job done by a foreign national for a different employer than the one to which the previous work permit was limited. In such cases, a declaration of the termination of previous employment shall accompany the application, along with a written employment contract between the foreign national and the new employer.

53. The Act on Services for People with Disabilities that have Long-term Support Needs No 38/2018 provides access to services related to work and habilitation that increase their ability to work and participate in daily life on an equal basis with others. Additionally, local authorities shall operate workplaces for sheltered work, habilitation and day care services for

people with disabilities, where they are offered access to developmental and occupational therapy and vocational training. The Directorate of Labour also assists people who have a reduced working capacity, including in relation to their participation in the labour market. The Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Activities of Rehabilitation Funds No 60/2012 ensures that individuals who lose their working capacity following an illness or accident receive counselling and resources which are intended to systematically contribute to their full or partial return to work.

Article 7 – Just and favourable conditions of work

Response to paragraph 11 of the Concluding Observations

54. The minimum pay in Iceland is determined through collective pay agreements on worker's pay and other terms of employment made between trade unions and employer organisations. Article 1 of Act No 55/1980 on Working Terms and Pension Rights Insurance provides that the pay and other terms of employment negotiated between labour market organisations shall be the basic minimum pay for all workers in the specific sector in the area covered by the agreement. Any agreements between individual workers and employers on worse employment terms than those determined by general collective pay agreements shall be invalid. Membership in a trade union is not a prerequisite for workers to enjoy minimum pay, and employers are bound by the provisions of collective pay agreements on pay and other terms of employment.

55. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health has the function of promoting a safe and healthy working environment in keeping with Act No 46/1980 on Working Environment, Health and Safety in Workplaces. It has placed a heavy emphasis on research, record keeping of work-related accidents, prevention and health promotion and keeps records of all work-related accidents and ensures the existence of conditions that allow the workplaces themselves to solve any safety and health problems. Additionally, the Administration has increasingly been offering courses in Polish and English for immigrants in the labour market.

56. Various changes have been made to better ensure protection of working conditions, safety and a healthy working environment. The Act on Social Security Occupational Injury Insurance was adopted in 2015. Its objective is to ensure social security compensation for work-related accidents regardless of the insured person's income. Additionally, numerous regulations have been adopted in recent years with the objective of increasing protection of working conditions.

57. Under Regulation No 1009/2015 on Measures Against Bullying, Sexual harassment, Gender-based harassment and Violence at work, employers are obliged to not tolerate bullying, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment and violence in the workplace, and shall ensure that they have a written safety and health plan for the workplace and a relevant action plan in place. If there is an indication of such behaviour in a workplace, the response shall be as swift as possible and shall be in accordance with the policy and action plan. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health serves a supervisory role in this respect and receives alerts. The Administration can respond by making a supervisory visit, or in another appropriate manner. Violations of the provisions of the Regulation may be punished by fines. The annual number of cases received by the Administration based on Regulation No 1009/2015 since 2015 has been between 15 and 44 cases.

Article 8 – The right to form and join Trade Unions

Response to paragraph 12 of the Concluding Observations

58. For an overview of the legislation on trade unions, please refer to Iceland's previous reports to the Committee. Traditionally, pay and other rights of employed persons in the Icelandic labour market are a matter of negotiation between organisations of labour unions and employer organisations. Therefore, the making of collective pay agreements in the general labour market is in the hands of powerful social partner organisations and without

Government interference. According to Act No 80/1938 on Trade Unions and Industrial Disputes, the social partners have the option to refer disputes to the State Conciliation and Mediation Officer. The current processes aims to promote independent collective pay agreements with the objective of avoiding unnecessary involvement by the public authorities in these discussions.

Article 9 – The right to social security

Response to paragraphs 13 and 14 of the Concluding Observations

Social Security

59. The monetary amounts paid in old age pensions, invalidity pensions and rehabilitation allowance are reviewed annually when the general budget is reviewed. Additionally, the child benefits have been raised in recent years and in 2020 a special child benefit supplement was disbursed in order to counteract the economic impacts of COVID-19.

60. Since 2011, the Ministry of Social Affairs has issued so-called consumption standards which were last updated in 2019. That arrangement is currently under review. The objective of drawing up consumption standards is to give the families in the country access to standards that they can refer to when they estimate their own expenses, and such standards can also be useful in financial consultations for individuals and serve as the basis for monetary amounts relating to living expenses. The basic standard was developed with a view to examining how much money individuals and families need to support themselves.

61. The objective of the Municipalities' Social Services Act No 40/1991 is to ensure financial and social security and to promote welfare. The implementation of social services should respect the right of individuals to self-determination and conditions are to be created where individuals can actively participate in society on their own terms. The municipalities are responsible for implementing financial assistance and determining the amounts.

Unemployment benefits

62. Unemployment benefits are covered by the Unemployment Insurance Act No 54/2006, as covered in more detail in Iceland's previous report to the Committee (E/C.12/ISL/4, 119–126) and in the comments on Article 6.

Article 10 – Rights of families

63. Iceland places a heavy emphasis on respect for the diversity of families. The Law in Respect of Marriage No 31/1993 has since 2010 applied to marriage between two individuals, regardless of gender. To better ensure the rights of LGBTI people to enjoy a family life, amendments were adopted to the Children Act in the spring of 2021, concerning the parental situation of trans people and individuals with a gender-neutral registration.

64. Comprehensive amendments to the Children Act No 76/2003 came into effect in 2013, when a new opening chapter entered into law. It consists of general provisions that are based on the fundamental principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2021 amendments were made to the Children Act, making it possible to negotiate split residence for children.

Maternity, paternity and parental leave

65. The Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Act No 144/2020 entered into force on 1 January 2021. The Act provides for the right to paid maternity/paternity leave for all parents. The Government has taken measures to encourage parents to split the leave equally to promote gender equality within homes and in the labour market. The maternity/paternity leave has been extended to 12 months. The independent right of each parent is six months of leave, but parents are authorised to transfer six weeks of leave, so that one parent can take 7 1/2 months of leave while the other takes 4 1/2 months. Further transfer of maternity/paternity leave is possible when one parent cannot, for specific reasons utilise their rights within the

system. The monthly benefit payments to parents on maternity/paternity leave amount to 80% of their average gross wage/salary. The maximum benefit payments have been raised in recent years and have amounted to ISK 600 000 per month since the beginning of 2019.

Children's welfare and child protection

66. In 2018, the Ministers for Social Affairs and Equality, Health, Education, Science and Culture, Justice, Transport and Local Government and the Association of Local Authorities signed a Memorandum of Understanding on removing barriers between systems, improving services for children and creating a child-friendly society. Subsequently, a steering group on matters concerning children began its work under the auspices of the Government Offices. A parliamentary committee on matters concerning children was also formed, with representatives from all the parliamentary parties. This work serves as the basis for a policy on a child-friendly Iceland that aims to ensure a comprehensive adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example through increased involvement and participation of children in public policy development.

67. Complex work has been ongoing for the last several years to revise the social framework of matters concerning children. One important element of that work is the development of a child welfare dashboard to collect the most important statistics that show the situation concerning the welfare of children in Iceland. The Dashboard shall be used in policy-making and prioritisation by the public authorities, as well as to inform public discussion on matters concerning children. The main objective is to draw up a comprehensive picture of children's welfare in Iceland, on the basis of the wide variety of statistical data available, for both State and municipalities. The idea is to collect statistical data on different issues and groups of children and to ensure that the authorities have an overview of the elements that concern the welfare of children.

68. A new law on the integration of services in the interest of children's welfare was passed by Althingi in the summer of 2021. The primary objective of the law is to promote the cooperation of all entities that offer services to children and ensure monitoring and harmonisation of the services offered by various bodies.

69. The Child Protection Act has recently been revised, with the objective of ensuring improved services in the interest of children, with an emphasis on early support and children's rights. The objective was also to increase professional knowledge within child protection activities, with changes to the administrative organisation of this policy area, where politically appointed child protection committees will be abolished and replaced by professionally appointed district councils.

Senior citizens

70. Under Act No 125/1999 on the Affairs of the Elderly, a special collaboration committee on the affairs of the elderly serves as a contact point between the ministries, institutions and organisations that operate on behalf of the elderly. A special development fund for the elderly is also in operation, which is intended to promote development and support services for the elderly. A working group on the living standards and conditions of the elderly was established in 2019. The role of the group includes addressing the best ways to organise services for the elderly, how the elderly can increase their disposable income through increased participation in the job market and by delaying drawing on their pensions, how to decrease the likelihood of social isolation among the elderly, and how to better use modern technologies for their benefit. Additionally, a working group on health promotion for the elderly was established in 2020. It is intended to submit proposals on the modalities of health promotion cooperation projects that will enable the elderly to live in their own homes for as long as possible.

People with disabilities

71. As previously mentioned, Iceland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Act on Services for People with Disabilities that have Long-term Support Needs is intended to ensure the appropriate services and support for people with disabilities. It provides, inter alia, for user-directed personal assistance that aims to ensure

the right of people with disabilities to live an active and independent life. The policy and implementation plan on matters concerning people with disabilities for 2017 to 2021 includes various measures that are intended to ensure the rights of people with disabilities. A more thorough exploration of this subject may be found in Iceland's first report on the implementation of the Convention.

Individuals seeking international protection

72. A new Foreign Nationals Act No 80/2016 entered into force on 1 January 2017. The Act is intended to ensure a just, efficient and humanitarian procedure and to update the legislation so it will comply with the strictest international criteria. The Act has reinforced the procedures and efficiency in the handling of matters concerning applicants for international protection and has a special emphasis on the rights of children and on reunification of families.

73. The Foreign Nationals Act reflects the provisions of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It therefore applies to individuals who have been the victims of persecution in their home countries or are at risk for death penalty, torture or inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, who have the right to international protection in Iceland. An applicant who does not receive acknowledgement of refugee status can, however, get a residence permit on the basis of humanitarian concerns, provided that there is a strong case for this, e.g. serious illness or difficult social conditions in the home country.

74. Applicants for international protection in Iceland have the right to be provided with housing while the application is being evaluated, as well as financial support if they are unable to support themselves. Applicants also have the right to general and necessary health care. Additionally, they have the right to a spokesperson who will give them legal assistance in connection with the application. The Icelandic Red Cross offers various support services and legal assistance to applicants, on the basis of an agreement between the Red Cross, the Directorate of Immigration and the Ministry of Justice.

75. The Directorate of Immigration operates a reception centre that is open to applicants for international protection to ensure the rights and safety of applicants, analyse their needs and provide them with sufficient services. Applicants have the right to medical assistance up until the day they leave or deportation. Individuals who are granted refugee status or a residence permit on the basis of humanitarian concerns enjoy health insurance as of the granting of the permit. Pregnant women who are applicants for international protection shall receive access to prenatal care and obstetric services.

76. Individuals who have been granted a residence permit on the basis of international protection, humanitarian concerns or because of a special connection with the country have the right to reunification with their core family, i.e. with their spouse and children under 18.

77. Applicants for international protection who have been granted a temporary residence permit can receive a temporary work permit that is valid until a decision has been made regarding their application, subject to the provisions of the Foreign Nationals' Right to Work Act No 97/2002.

78. Children who apply for international protection shall be able to receive compulsory education or comparable education within the public school system or at their place of residence, as soon as possible.

Stereotypes and violence

Response to paragraph 15 of the Concluding Observations

79. For a discussion on gender-based violence and stereotypes, please refer to the comments on Article 3.

Article 11 – The right to an adequate standard of living

Response to paragraph 16 of the Concluding Observations

Poverty

80. A steering group on matters concerning homeless people with diverse problems was appointed in 2018. The role of the group was to examine comments from the Welfare Watch regarding this policy area, with the aim of setting up day care facilities, improving access to treatments for drug dependence, increasing the number of treatment centres, finding job opportunities, nursing home rooms for older homeless people with diverse problems, looking into the housing shortage and researching ways to shorten the case processing time.

81. In 2019, a report was published on a survey of the living conditions and poverty among children in Iceland. The main conclusions of the report are that the living conditions of children in Iceland are good compared with most other European countries but the most urgent matter is to improve the living conditions of single parents and their children and to look into the situation of the children of people with disabilities. It points out that the housing market situation has a considerable effect on the lives of children. The Welfare Watch submitted recommendations to the Government based on the report, which has been an important contribution to the work that is now ongoing with regard to matters concerning children.

82. The Welfare Watch has an important role in forwarding comments to the authorities during the COVID-19 situation, so that the authorities could, give the highest consideration to those most adversely affected. A special welfare service response team and a Ministry of Social Affairs restructuring team were established and they have worked closely with the Welfare Watch.

The right to appropriate housing

83. In recent years the buying and rental prices of housing have risen steeply and young people and people with low incomes have found it increasingly difficult to buy their own housing.

84. Numerous actions have been taken in recent years to improve the housing market situation. A new housing support scheme was established in 2016, called the public rental dwellings scheme that has the aim to increase access to appropriate rental housing at affordable prices for people under a certain income and property threshold. Public rental dwellings are, inter alia, financed with foundation capital from the State and municipalities of 30% or more of the cost of such dwellings, which makes it easier to finance them, as well as making it possible for the operators to offer more manageable rental prices than would otherwise be the case. Foundation capital has already been disbursed for building or buying 2,625 public rental dwellings and the endowment capital amounts to ISK 15.9 billion, and an allocation of an extra four billion ISK is now under way. The scheme is intended to increase the number of dwellings for the elderly, people with disabilities, students and people in the labour market who have low incomes, as well as increasing public housing and special living solutions for people with disabilities that are intended to replace the old group homes. However, the demand for municipal public housing is still bigger than the availability.

85. A new housing support scheme for renters began operations in 2017 and rental benefits were replaced with housing benefits. At the same time, the obligation of municipalities to pay special extra housing benefits to those who need them entered into law; previously only a third of municipalities had offered special rental benefits.

86. Large scale policy development with recommendations took place in 2019. These include new State-granted participating loans to help first-time buyers, and people who have been renting in the last five years, to buy their own housing; the participating loans are intended to bridge the own capital requirement when buying housing by having the State grant an interest and payment-free loan of up to 20%, with an own capital contribution of at least 5 % by the buyer and a first mortgage of 75%, for up to 25 years. Work is also under way to gather information about the housing market in a more complete manner, to underpin

a more focused policy development in this area and reduce fluctuations in the housing market. Other efforts include boosting the housing market outside the capital area through various measures, including the establishment of a special public rental company.

Article 12 – The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Response to paragraph 17 of the Concluding Observations

87. The Health Service Act No 40/2007 provides that all the inhabitants of the country shall have access to the best health care available at any given time, to protect their mental, physical and social health. Additionally, the Patients' Rights Act No 74/1997 provides that it is prohibited to discriminate between patients on the basis of their personal characteristics or status in society. A health policy up to the year 2030 was adopted in 2019. Its objectives include to define better the role of individual elements of the health care services and how they interact.

88. Furthering health care clinics as the first stop for users of the health care system is public policy in Iceland. Various measures have been taken to further this role of the health care clinics, and the services they offer have been expanded. There has been a focus on increasing interdisciplinary cooperation to better meet the diverse needs of the users and promote continuous services. Mental health teams have been established in every health-care district, as well as specialised mental health teams that serve the whole country. Special funds were allocated to health-promoting reception facilities that are intended to serve elderly and/or chronically ill individuals. Health care clinic admission fees have been systematically decreased and a referral system has been introduced for services to children which ensures them services free of charge. The services of the health care clinics are free of charge for children, people with disabilities, the elderly and during pregnancy.

89. There is an emphasis on promoting electronic health care services, including country-wide distance health-care services. The aim is to try to equalise the public's access to health care services and to increase efficiency and quality. Efforts have been made to ensure that as many people as possible are able to use electronic health care services; it should be mentioned in this context that 96 % of Icelandic homes have Internet access. Accessibility has been ensured using the WCAG standard, as well as offering special telephone or net chat assistance.

90. Steps have been taken to increase equality within the health care system, e.g. by altering the co-payment systems for medicines and health care services and by making agreements for increased participation by Icelandic Health Insurance in the cost of dental care for children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

91. The maximum payments by patients for health care services have been capped at ISK 75,802 per year and at ISK 26,753 per month. The cap is lower for people with disabilities and the elderly, ISK 50,538 per year and at ISK 17,835 per month. The same applies to children who receive services without a referral. All health care services are free of charge for children under two. General medical services are free of charge for all children. Children aged 2–7 who have a referral from a general practitioner or primary care practitioner receive specialised medical services free of charge. However, children who receive this kind of service without a referral pay 30% of the cost of the service until the cap is reached.

92. Icelandic Health Insurance participates in the cost of medicines for individuals. The co-pay system for purchasing medicines is based on a stepped scheme where each individual pays proportionally less as their expenses for buying medicines increase over a 12-month period. In step one, the individuals pay the full price for the medicines, in step two they pay 15% of the price of the medicines, and in step three they pay 7.5%. When the expenses have reached a certain cap, the medicines are paid in full by Icelandic Health Insurance for the remainder of the period. The main objective of this scheme is to ensure equality between individuals and reduce costs for those who need to use a lot of medicines. The cap is lower for people over 67, people with disabilities, and children and young people under 22.

93. Since 2018, all children have had the right to free dental services, except for an annual facility fee of ISK 2 500. Icelandic Health Insurance has paid half of the cost of general dental

services for the elderly and people with disabilities since 1 September 2018. Icelandic Health Insurance also pays fully for general dental services for elderly people and people with disabilities who have been ill for a long time and are staying in hospitals, nursing homes or nursing facilities within gerontology institutes. The same applies to people with developmental disabilities, 18 years and older.

Infectious diseases and COVID-19

94. The Directorate of Health is responsible for implementing infectious disease control measures, under the supervision of the Minister of Health. The Chief Epidemiologist works within the Directorate of Health and is responsible for infectious disease controls.

95. COVID-19 preparedness in Iceland is carried out under an action plan drawn up by the Chief Epidemiologist and the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police's Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management. Instructions as to who is required to be quarantined and isolated due to COVID-19 are issued by the authorities in each case. Individuals who are required to quarantine or isolate but who have no place to go or for whom it is not advisable to quarantine or isolate at home, can stay in a public quarantine facility, in consultation with the health authorities in each location. The Chief Epidemiologist is responsible for the organisation and coordination of vaccinations against COVID-19.

Sterilisations and Abortions

96. The Act on Sterilisation Procedures No 35/2019 entered into force in May 2019. The objective of the Act is to ensure all individuals the self-determination to make decisions about undergoing a sterilisation procedure and to promote human rights and security of person. Sterilisation is permitted for a person who wishes to undergo one and has attained the age of 18.

97. A new Termination of Pregnancy Act No 43/2019 entered into force in September 2019, the objective of which is to ensure that the right of women to self-determination is respected. The request for a termination of pregnancy shall come from the woman herself and the woman's enlightened consent must in all cases be obtained, regardless of her age.

Mental health matters

98. A policy and an action plan on mental health matters up to 2020 were adopted in 2016, with a main focus on integrating services for people with mental health problems and for their families, as well as on the promotion of mental health care and preventive measures, with a special focus on children and young people. Consideration is also to be given to various marginalised groups and vulnerable stages of life, and measures were identified to decrease prejudice and discrimination. The health care clinics have been given an important role in the promotion of mental health care services. An emphasis has been placed on increasing the number of psychologists and interdisciplinary health care teams in health care clinics all over the country. At the same time, direct financial contributions to mental health care have increased considerably in the period from 2018 to 2021, and a special appropriation was allocated to mental health care in response to COVID-19.

99. The wait for specialised team services in mental health services has been long, including for children. A lack of staff for the teams is part of the reason, and the Minister of Health has submitted a parliamentary proposal on establishing a national interdisciplinary council on staffing and education in health care services. It should also be mentioned that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs have been working together to analyse the reasons for the long waiting time for children and are planning on continuing their collaboration to improve the services and shorten the waiting time.

100. A mental health care team for prisons was established in December 2019, and in June 2020 financing was given to a special team for people with developmental disorders in combination with mental health problems. A mental health care team dedicated to family protection was also established. The Reykjavík Area Health-Care Service manages these teams, but they serve the whole country.

101. A regular collaboration between the Ministry of Health and beneficiaries of mental health care services began in 2018, with work focused on improving the health care system to better meet the needs of people with mental health problems. An additional response to COVID-19 was organised by setting up a temporary mental health council that has the role of systematically integrating measures and ensuring the coordination of information dissemination to vulnerable groups. The Directorate of Health and the Ministry of Health have monitored the public health and mental health situation regarding COVID-19. Two working groups have been entrusted with monitoring, respectively, public health and mental health in these pandemic times.

102. The Directorate of Health has organised a project centred on a health-promoting society and health-promoting schools the objective of which is to promote better health and well-being among the people of the country and at all school levels. A working group on the promotion of mental health under the auspices of the Directorate of Health submitted a report in 2020 which included various suggestions.

Alcohol and substance abuse prevention

103. The alcohol and substance abuse prevention policy up to 2020 places an emphasis on prevention and on reducing the harm that alcohol and drug abuse has on individuals, families and the community. An agreement has been made between the Icelandic Health Insurance and the National Center of Addiction Medicine on the operation of alcohol and substance abuse treatment programs. The National Center of Addiction Medicine operates detoxification and rehabilitation centres for alcoholics and other substance abusers and also offers therapy for the families of addicts.

104. Landspítali has been handling the rehabilitation of children with addiction problems since 2019. It operates an interdisciplinary rehabilitation team that has professional knowledge, with members from the Addiction Treatment Center, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department and the child protection authorities. When treatment at Landspítali is finished, the hospital is entrusted with placing children with substance abuse and addiction problems in the appropriate treatment program, such as the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department, Stuðlar, or other treatment options, as appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

105. The Icelandic Red Cross has, with support from the State, operated a service intended to reach out to intravenous drug users and offer them harm-reducing services in the form of health care and a hypodermic needle-exchange program. A law was adopted in the spring of 2020 that provides for an authorisation for municipalities to set up drug consumption facilities for individuals of 18 years and older.

Articles 13 and 14 – The right to an education

Response to paragraph 18 of the Concluding Observations

106. Icelandic education policy is contained in legislation on educational matters, in National Curriculum Guidelines and various policy papers of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The principal aim of the education policy is to create an environment that fosters the pre-primary, primary and secondary education levels as well as university-level education and continuing education, to lay a foundation for active participation in a democratic society and provide proper preparation and diverse opportunities for further education and employment in the labour market. The educational policy in the National Curriculum Guidelines for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools is based on six basic fundamental pillars; literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity. Education on the basis of democracy and human rights is based on critical thinking and deliberation on the basic values of society. This kind of education assumes both collaboration within and outside the schools.

107. The pre-primary level is defined as the first level of the school system, with around 97% of all children between the ages of 3 and 5 going to pre-school. General compulsory education in primary schools is for the ages of 6 to 16; all pupils have the right to a suitable education, free of charge. Following compulsory education, all children have the right to go

to secondary school, but the duty to inform and educate ends at age 18. Education at the compulsory school level is not entirely free, as there is a provision in the law that allows for charging fees for writing materials, school trips, school meals and leisure activities. The majority of municipalities, with around 99% of all pupils, have already responded by abolishing fees for writing materials, and some have gone even further.

108. The current education policy entails equal opportunities to study and inclusive education at the pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary levels. It has, however, proved challenging to ensure coordinated and rights-based services. The findings of the assessment of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education of the implementation of the policy of inclusive education in 2017 confirm that the legislation and policy development give support to the objectives of inclusive education and comply with international obligations. The findings also show that the educational system as a whole is well-funded, but the allocation of those funds needs to be reconsidered in order to better support the policy of inclusive education. However, it is also pointed out in the findings that the policy has not been systematically implemented into the Icelandic education system. Since , further review of the implementation has taken place and a systematic collaboration has been established within the educational system and more emphasis has been placed on inter-ministerial collaboration, and with municipalities on matters concerning children and young people. Additionally, a steering group was formed with key stakeholders in the educational system in order to make an action plan in keeping with the findings of the assessment; this group made it possible to carry out various schemes. The aim of that work was to further ensure the integration of services for the good of children's welfare, including children with disabilities. The opportunities of people with disabilities, and especially developmentally disabled people, for education after upper secondary school have been limited, but the education and social affairs authorities have made efforts to offer suitable educational resources for that group.

109. In 2014, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture published a white paper on education reform which is based on the vision for the future that young people in Iceland should have the same opportunities to live and work in an ever-changing world as their peers in comparable countries. The aim was to make education in Iceland comparable with the best education available abroad. The white paper set out two main goals for education reforms until 2018, one regarding reading and literacy and the other regarding students finishing upper secondary school at the right time.

110. The education policy up to 2030 was adopted by Althingi in the spring of 2021. The policy was developed in consultation with the educational community and other stakeholders. The goal of the policy is to provide outstanding education in an environment where everyone can learn, and everyone matters. The policy, which is intended to be implemented in three phases, is divided into five pillars: equal opportunities for all, first-class teaching, proficiency for the future, well-being as a principle, and quality at the forefront. The motto for the new education policy is "outstanding education for life" and its values are resilience, courage, knowledge, happiness and sustainability. A plan will be submitted at the start of each implementation phase, along with measures to be taken and key performance indicators.

111. Financial contributions to education have increased in recent years, for example in connection with the goals set on the basis of the aforementioned white book from 2014. An additional contribution was allocated to the secondary schools and universities in response to COVID-19, to ensure opportunities to receive education and training for more people.

112. Although most children enrol in upper secondary school, the drop-out rate has been an on-going challenge, not least amongst children of foreign origin. The percentage of students who graduate on time s in upper secondary schools has, been slowly increasing. In 2006 it was 45%, but in 2017 it had risen to 54%. The percentage of immigrants who graduate from upper secondary school continues to be lower; in 2017 it was 28.2%. Efforts have been made to counteract this, including through a special scheme of measures to reduce the drop-out rate. Additionally, the 2016 implementation plan on matters concerning immigrants emphasises equal status and opportunities for education and states that systematic efforts shall be made to reduce the drop-out rate of immigrants from upper secondary schools through support at all school levels, inter alia through an increased emphasis on native language teaching. In 2020, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issued a guide in

three languages about the support available and building up collaboration for encouraging active bilingualism in school and leisure activities.

113. In 2020, a working group under the auspices of the Minister of Education, Science and Culture submitted a draft policy on the education of children and young people with a diverse linguistic and cultural background. This policy development is an important step in the journey towards promoting the educational system framework to improve conditions for plurilingual students. The working group made recommendations on multicultural school activities, continuous studies, Icelandic as a second language, parents and multilingualism, applicants for international protection, teacher training and educational research. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is working on an action plan that is expected to be ready in 2021.

Article 15 – The right to take part in cultural life

Response to paragraph 19 of the Concluding Observations

114. A cultural policy was adopted in 2013. This was the first time a special Icelandic State policy in the field of arts and cultural heritage was adopted in Iceland, thus ensuring the State's involvement in these policy areas. It rests on four pillars: Firstly, creativity and participation in cultural life; secondly, an emphasis on good accessibility to the arts and cultural heritage; thirdly, an emphasis on the importance of the State's cooperation with the numerous people and bodies operating in the cultural arena; and finally, the importance of children and young people's participation in cultural life.

115. The country's schools at all levels can and shall play an important role in equalising children's access to culture, by integrating creativity and art into the school activities. The Art for All project is intended to choose art events and distribute them to children and young people all over the country, thus equalising the access of compulsory school age children to diverse and high-quality art events, regardless of their residence and economic situation.

116. A youth policy was adopted in 2014, with an emphasis on elements that promote the necessary development and structuring of youth activities in Iceland. The Government has also taken extensive action to limit the disruption of sports and leisure activities in connection with COVID-19. A new policy for community and leisure activities for children and young people up to 2030 is being developed in broad consultation with stakeholders. The goal is to offer children and young people the opportunity, through organised community and recreational activities, to participate on their own terms, to develop in a safe environment, and at the same time uphold the core values of living in a democratic society.

117. A new sports policy was adopted in 2019. Active participation and access to sports activities for everyone continue to be the guiding principles. It emphasises a closer cooperation within the sports movement, the participation of multilingual young people, and equality. It defines priority projects, especially with a view to three factors, i.e. to ensure easy access for participants regardless of their origin and situation, that the facilities used for sports activities are safe for both users and staff, and supporting the professional framework for sports activities in the country.

118. Under the Municipalities' Social Services Act, No 40/1991, people with disabilities shall have access to transport services with the aim of enabling them to go where they want to go in the manner they choose and at the time they choose, at a reasonable price. The objective of travel services for people with disabilities is to enable people who are unable to utilise public transport due to a disability, to work, study and pursue leisure activities.

119. The Science and Technology Policy Council develops the public policy for science and technology in Iceland. The Council submits a science and technology policy every three years and is now working on adopting the policy for the years 2020 to 2022. One of the primary objectives of the current policy is that research and innovation should be of use to the community to meet societal challenges. The policy also includes a measure intended to promote science communication and create a framework that will ensure the public and public institutions access to evidence-based information.