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**Consideration of reports: reports submitted by States parties
in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**

List of issues in connection with the consideration of the fourth periodic report of Iceland concerning articles 1 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/ISL/4)

Addendum

Replies by the Government of Iceland to the list of issues*

[1 November 2012]

* In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not edited.

I. General information

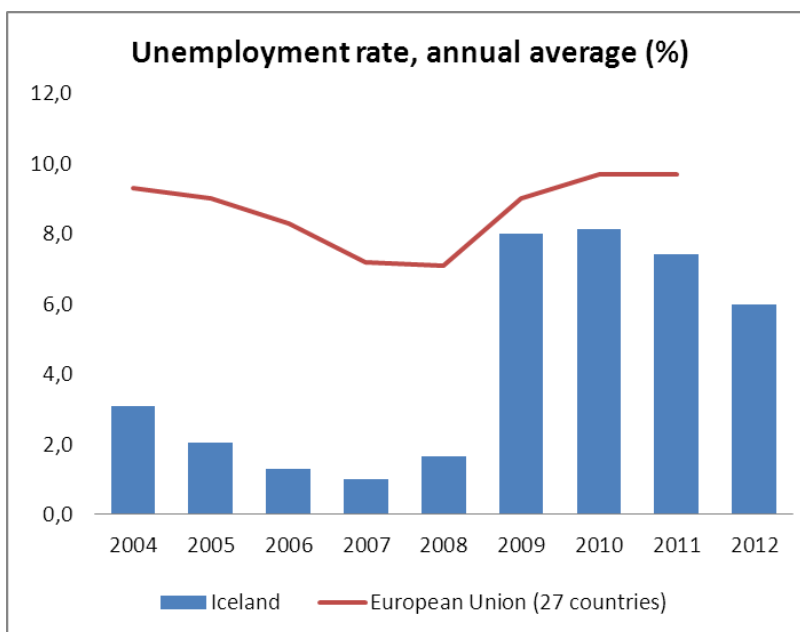
Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues (E/C.12/ISL/Q/4)

1. The main characteristics of Iceland's approach to dealing with the effects of the severe economic crisis in 2008 are an emphasis on redistribution, through the tax system and the social protection system, along with debt relief measures that also were disproportionately aimed at the middle and lower income groups. Various efforts to alleviate unemployment were also implemented. The devaluation of the national currency led to a big cut in real earnings through price inflation while incomes lagged behind. That cut in living standards fell however disproportionately on higher income households, due to the policy of redistribution. In the years 2008-2010 the disposable income of low income groups fell by 9 per cent while the income of the group with the highest income fell by 38 per cent. The policies have thus succeeded in containing poverty problems and softening financial hardship amongst the most vulnerable.¹

2. Iceland seems now to be firmly on a resurrection course, with economic growth of 3.1 per cent in 2011 and prospects of a 2.8 per cent growth in 2012.² Real wages have increased significantly and so has private consumption; unemployment is presently on a slow downward path.³

Work

3. Before the financial collapse in October 2008, unemployment had for a long time been very low in Iceland. Registered unemployment in 2005 averaged 2.1 per cent; in 2006, 1.3 per cent and in 2007, 1 per cent. Registered unemployment rose very rapidly following the financial crisis in October 2008.



¹ EU-SI Network Report 2 2012 Iceland's Way Out of the Crisis, Stefan Olafsson.

² Statistics Iceland economic forecast summer 2012. For further information please see: <http://www.statice.is/pages/2500>

³ EU-SI Network Report 2 2012 Iceland's Way Out of the Crisis, Stefan Olafsson.

Table no. 1- Directorate of Labour, Eurostat - Statistics Iceland economic forecast summer 2012 for unemployment 2012

4. Registered unemployment rate in 2009 was 8.0 per cent and 8.1 per cent in 2010. The unemployment rate subsided somewhat in 2011 or to 7.4 per cent. In September 2012 the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent, but the forecast annual average for 2012 is 6 per cent. Participation in the labour market still continues at a high level in Iceland, both by women and men, although it has decreased somewhat during the crisis or from 83,3 in 2007 to 80,4 in 2011 (Statistics Iceland). Although the level of unemployment is historically high in Iceland annual average has been below the EU average through the crisis and the prognosis for 2012 is generally good compared to the biggest part of EU nations, even some of the most prosperous countries that were not seriously hit by the financial crisis.

5. The Government enacted targeted labour market measures to address short term needs and to mitigate the impact of long term unemployment, a situation which has rarely occurred in Iceland in the past decades. Immediately in October 2008, negotiations began between representatives of the Government and the social partners on ways to meet the needs of the labour market. Particular consideration has been given to young people and groups that risk long-term unemployment, such as people with no vocational training.

6. In 2010 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security (now the Ministry of Welfare) put forward the aim that no one should be unemployed for longer than three months without being offered employment or an opportunity to be active. The Directorate of Labour reached these goals in close cooperation with the social partners and municipalities as well as educational providers.

7. Special measures were enacted to activate and increase job search and support to educational efforts and vocational training, such as *Study is a Working Way*. The Government has also organized various job creation plans to increase job opportunities, especially for young people (including offers for summer-time jobs for students) and the long-term unemployed. These include *Working-Way and Job-Square*.

8. A government committee with representatives from the Ministries, the Directorate of Labour and the Social Partners is expected to submit its proposal on a national strategy for employment before the end of November 2012.

Social security

9. Following the economic crisis in 2008 cutting down on public expenditure was inevitable. Welfare expenditures were however sheltered with a lower overall degree of cuts than in other sectors of public expenditure.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	Change 2008-2011
01 General Public service	114.291	161.398	141.521	136.717	20%
02 Defence	1.056	706	778	655	-38%
03 Public order and safety	26.687	26.498	22.335	23.428	-12%
04 Economic affairs	342.900	101.440	111.897	93.360	-73%
05. Enviromental protection	11.695	10.927	10.364	10.453	-11%
06 Housing and community amenities	8.978	8.015	39.952	4.912	-45%
07 Health	139.596	135.145	125.921	124.189	-11%
08 Recreation, culture and religion	66.590	60.019	58.923	56.607	-15%
09 Education	147.105	138.598	133.222	128.073	-13%
10 Social protection	156.954	183.186	179.032	190.947	22%
Total expenditure	1.015.852	825.931	823.944	769.343	-24%

Table no. 2- General Government total expenditure by functions 2008-2011. (Hagstofa Íslands, Statistics Iceland)

10. Welfare expenditures were rearranged and were on the whole more directed at lower income households with significant increase in some areas, such as unemployment benefits, and cuts in others. Unemployment benefits were increased, In the case of disability pensioners and old-age pensioners expenditures were to a greater extent directed at lower income pensioners, with significant increase of minimum pension guarantee, while cuts were implemented for pensioners with higher earnings, such as from occupational pension funds or other sources⁴ As a result the percentage of those at the risk of poverty threshold is lower than it was in 2007. The Government is however concerned about the high percentage of single parent families below the risk of poverty threshold. Improved fiscal position makes it possible to emphasize improvement in conditions for families with children. The fiscal budget for 2013 includes substantial raise of child benefits and housing benefits and payment during maternity/paternity will also be increased significantly.

11. A bill on a new act on social security is expected to be submitted to the Parliament in November. The purpose of the revision of the current legislation is to simplify the old age and disability pension system. The revision builds on the current two pillar system of a pension from occupational pension funds with a guarantee of additional minimum pension from the social security for those with income below a certain amount.

Housing⁵

12. Most loans to households in Iceland are indexed to prices and thus the principal increases with inflation. Inflation had started to increase from late 2007 and onwards in early 2008, so inflation was already then adding to the increased debt level. This was exacerbated further with the fall of the banks in October 2008, which led to a dramatic rise in inflation and thus a greatly increased level of housing debts. This together with cuts in household income created serious financial difficulties for many families. The Government instigated debt relief measures. These involved both measures to lower principals of housing debt for households with lower earnings and highly negative equity situation, as well as debt relief measures (freezing of repayment while refinancing or restructuring debts and increased subsidies of interest cost of housing loans). The raising of the tax relief for interest cost of housing loans was perhaps the most consequential measure for most households, and more so for the lower and middle-income households.

13. The result of those measures is that debt levels have come significantly down and by end of 2011, it was in fact close to the level prevailing in 2007, a year before the financial collapse. It is estimated that 15-20 per cent of household debts has been written down on average in Iceland or are in the process of being written down. But this is not at all a flat rate write-down but strategically aimed at the more needy households. Debt relief has also been greatly expanded through subsidies of interest costs of housing loans. In 2010 the Government paid about 32 per cent of the interest cost of housing loans in Iceland and up to 45 per cent for the lowest income groups. That measure is also quite redistributive in its effect on income distribution.

⁴ EU-SI Network Report 2 2012 Iceland's Way Out of the Crisis, Stefan Olafsson.

⁵ See Stefan Olafsson. Iceland's way out of the crisis (www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu)

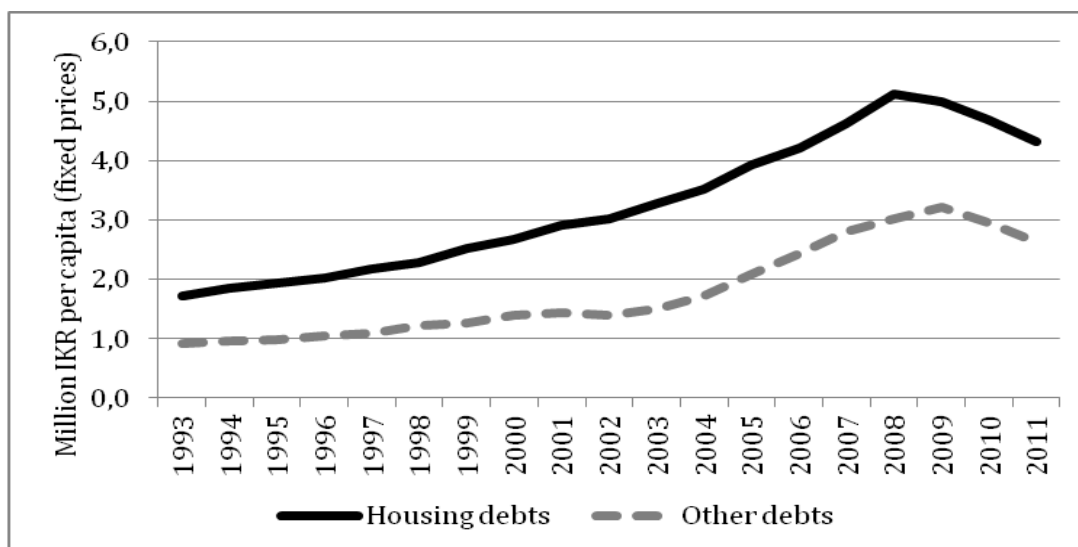


Table no. 3 - Debts of households, 1993 through 2011; housing debts and other debts in real Isk. kr. per capita (prices of 2010). Table from the Social Research Centre: Tax data analysis and Central Bank estimate for 2011

14. By end of 2011 the debt level of households seems clearly to have been lowered significantly, in fact approaching the level of 2007. The main reason for that seems to be, that the general purchasing power has come decisively down and consumer loans play by now a larger role than the burden of housing loans, due to the generous subsidies for interest cost of housing loans. The burden of housing loans is no more the biggest debt burden for the majority of indebted households.

15. Statistics Iceland published a report on overall housing cost burden by the end of April 2012 (Hagstofa Íslands 2012), based on EU-SILC data. The finding of Statistics Iceland is that the overall burden of housing cost was higher in 2004-5 than it was in 2010.

Education

16. During the extensive budget cuts efforts were made to shelter welfare and education. With respect to children, no changes have been made in the legal framework to allow for reduced service for children in the field of education and fiscal efforts have been made to protect economic, social and cultural rights. Efforts are made to continue to provide for a safe and secure environment and free education for children and young persons between six and twenty years old and quality preschool at low cost for children between the age 1½ to 2 years up to compulsory school. Meals are provided for all preschool- and compulsory school children.

Article 2, paragraph 2 - Non-discrimination

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 2 of the list of issues

17. The Ministry of Welfare, in co-operation with the social partners, has prepared a bill of law to implement the Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC and the part of the Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC that regards the labour market. The aim of the bill is to combat discrimination in the labour market, both public and private, on all grounds. The bill will stipulate specifically prohibition of discrimination in working life on the grounds of race and ethnic origin, age, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation and transgender identity. The bill is expected to be submitted to the Parliament in 2012. A bill to implement

directive 2000/43/EC regarding issues outside the labour market (including housing and social assistance) is expected to be submitted to the Parliament at the same time.

18. On 11 June 2012 the Parliament approved a Parliamentary Resolution on a Plan of Action on Disabled Persons' Affairs until 2014. The plan of Action takes account of the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities and other international human rights agreements to which Iceland is a party. Emphasis is placed on human rights and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability.

19. All compulsory school pupils in Iceland have the right to appropriate instruction within an encouraging study environment in suitable facilities which takes into account their needs and general well-being. This is stipulated in the Compulsory School Act. A compulsory school shall endeavour to organize its activities in such a way that pupils feel safe and able to apply their talents to the fullest. Pupils have the right to have their special needs met regarding studies in inclusive compulsory school, and regardless of their physical or mental attainment.

20. According to the Upper secondary school Act, pupils with special needs shall be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialized assistance and appropriate facilities shall be provided as considered necessary by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Pupils with special needs shall study side by side with other pupils, but in addition in many schools there are special four years lines of study where most of the disabled pupils are provided with education according to individual educational plans. All disabled students have the right to attend upper secondary schools and the financial crisis has not effected this provision.

Article 3 - Equal rights of men and women

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 3 of the list of issues.

21. This year's findings of the World Economic Forum show that Iceland tops the overall rankings in The Global Gender Gap Index for the fourth consecutive year.⁶ In spite of these positive advances gender equality has not yet been achieved. The Government is fully aware that additional efforts have to be made. The biggest challenges are in the area of work. The gender pay gap still persists and women hold fewer leadership positions. Choice of education and career paths also tends to be quite traditional, although some improvements have been made in recent years. Several actions have been undertaken to address these challenges. Parliament passed legislation in 2010 requiring companies with 50 employees or more, to have both women and men on their company boards, and if there are three or more board members, the percentage of either sex must not be under 40 per cent. This legislation will take effect in 2013, but there are indications that it has already had a positive effect. In June 2011 the Parliament approved a resolution on a new four year gender equality action program.

22. The difference in income earnings of women and men has always been considerable in Iceland. In the last couple of years there has been a decrease in the difference. In 2006 women in Iceland earned 61,3 per cent of men's total income but in 2009 the percentage was 67,7. This change is mostly because of men's loss of income and is a side effect of the economic crisis. Between the years 2007 and 2008 increase of men's income was 3,83 per cent but at the same time women increased their income of 7,95 per cent. Between the years 2008 to 2009 men decreased their income of 5,73 per cent but women continued to increase their income, though only by 0,25 per cent.

⁶ <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>.

23. The commercial and office workers' union (VR) has done yearly studies of the gender pay gap. In the year 2006 the gap was 13,1 per cent, in 2007 it was 11,6 per cent, in 2008 12,3 per cent, in 2009 and 2010 the gap was the same, 10,1 per cent, and in the year 2011 the gap was 10,6 per cent. Now in the year 2012 the gap is 9,4 per cent. The Union of Public Servants (SFR) has also done yearly studies of the gender pay gap and the findings have not been quite as positive. In the year 2007 the gap was 14,7 per cent, in 2008 it was 17,2 per cent, in 2009 11,8 per cent, in 2010 the gap was 9,9 per cent and in 2011 the gender pay gap was 13,2 per cent. Now in the year 2012 the gap is 12 per cent. The Government finds these numbers to be of concern.

24. Promoting gender equality and ensuring that women and men enjoy equal rights in all respects has been a key priority of the Government of Iceland for many years. Various mechanisms have been put in place to ensure gender equality as well as affirmative actions in different sectors. The Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security (now the Minister of Welfare), the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and the Icelandic Confederation of Labour made an agreement with the Icelandic Standards (*Staðlaráð Íslands*) in 2008 for the creation and management of a standard on the implementation of equal pay and equal opportunities policies. Work on the preparation of the standard took longer time than expected at the beginning but the work of a special Technical Committee ended in the spring of 2012. A motion for a new standard, ÍST 85 Equal pay management system – Requirements and guidance was advertised for comments at Icelandic Standards. The process ended on 20 September 2012. It is estimated that the new standard will be issued in December 2012.

25. Another recent effort is a new action plan which the Minister of Welfare introduced on 24 October 2012. The action plan is a comprehensive four year plan with active measures which are aimed at eliminating the gender pay gap in the Icelandic labour market. The action plan includes actions that affect both the public and the private labour market. The Government and the social partners have also signed a memorandum on cooperation in order to eliminate the gender pay gap. The new action plan includes, inter alia, actions such as studies on the gender pay gap, regular appraisals of the salaries of men and women in ministries and government institutions and research of how the maternity and paternity leave have affected the opportunities of women and men to co-ordinate working life and family life.

26. Regarding measures to increase the representation of women in the academia, a conference was held in 2011 on how to increase the diversity of leadership in the academy particularly in medicine, science, and engineering. Decision-making processes at critical junctures in an academic career such as hiring, promotion, and competition for prestigious awards were discussed. Following the conference a committee has been working on ways to improve women's representation. Although women are still underrepresented there has been some progress in recent years. Presently two women are rectors of universities in Iceland, including the University of Iceland, which is the oldest and largest university in Iceland, and Bifröst University which is one of the smaller universities. In 2001 women were 16.7 per cent of university professors, 29.9 per cent of associate professors and 54 per cent of assistant professors. In 2010, the representation of women had increased to 26.7 per cent of university professors, 35.2 per cent of associate professors and 50.4 per cent of associate lecturers, according to Statistics Iceland.

27. On 19 May 2011 the Government adopted a resolution on a four year action plan on equal rights. There a project on gender equality in higher education is defined. The plan is that education on gender equality will be established within all universities in Iceland. A working group shall be appointed to plan and implement the project, with representatives from universities and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and specialist in gender studies. Experiences shall be shared between schools with presentations, meetings,

and collaboration. In 2013 and 2014 equal rights awards will be given to those who excel in this field.

28. The representation of women in the District Courts has increased significantly in recent years or from 8 out of 38 judges in 2003 (21 per cent) to 15 out of 43 judges in 2012 (35 per cent). The same cannot be said about women's representation in the Supreme Court where women were only 2 out of 9 in 2003 (22 per cent) and 2 out of 12 in 2012 (16.6 per cent).

29. Regarding measures to increase the representation of women in the Foreign Service the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Iceland has, in accordance with Icelandic Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, adopted and implemented a Plan of Action on Gender Equality for its operations, which contains a clause on promotions within the Foreign Service. The clause requires that all available positions shall be open to applications from both women and men. An advertisement for available positions shall not be directed at one gender only and the content of such advertisements shall always be gender sensitive. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs aims to achieve gender equality in all its work and assignments. Staff members are not to be discriminated against on the basis of gender in the context of promotions. During the past four years, the Minister for Foreign Affairs has appointed four ambassadors: two women and two men. Over the past two years the MFA has recruited over 20 translators for its Translation Centre, about two-third are women. There have been five recruitments for administrative officers in the Translation Centre, two men and three women. In 2011 the MFA assigned 10 temporary officers, half of them women, half of them men.

30. With respect to information on cases from the Centre for Gender Equality, the Centre referred two cases to the Gender Equality Complaints Committee in 2012. Both cases concerned wage discrimination, and are still under consideration in the Committee.

II. Issues relating to the specific provisions of the Covenant (arts. 6-15)

Article 6 - The right to work

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 4 of the list of issues

31. The provisions of the Act on Foreigners regarding temporary work permits described in Iceland's report, paragraph 79-81 still apply. Thus the employer applies for the work permit on behalf of the foreign national, and the applicant signs the application together with the employer. The permit is then granted to the foreign national but limited to the work for the said employer. The employee and the employer are supposed to appeal together cannot bring an appeal against decisions by the Directorate of Labour on temporary work permits to the Ministry of Welfare. Changes of the procedure are under consideration but no decision has as yet been taken.

Article 7 - The right to just and favourable conditions of work

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 5 of the list of issues

32. The minimum wages and other working terms for each sector are determined in respective collective agreements. According to article 1 of the Act No 55/1980, on Workers' Wages and Terms of Employment and Obligatory Insurance of Pension Rights, the wages and other working terms agreed between the social partners shall be considered

minimum terms, independent of sex, nationality or term of appointment, for all employees in the relevant occupation within the area covered by the collective agreements. Contracts made between individual employee and employer on poorer working terms than those specified in the general collective agreements shall be void.

33. Article 2 of Act 55/1980 furthermore stipulates that agreements made between the social partners regarding the handling of disputes as to whether the wages and terms of employees on the Icelandic labour market conform with the provisions of legislation and collective agreements shall have the same general validity as their collective agreements on wages and other terms of service under article 1 of Act No 55/1980, with the limitations stated in the agreements. Thus the minimum wage determined in collective agreements constitutes minimum wages in the said sector and that minimum wage also applies to migrant workers.

34. The collective agreement then decides the minimum wages on the Icelandic labour market. A stipulation by law on a national minimum wage would therefore not give any more protection to migrant workers or others than the stipulation that working terms, including wages, which are not in conformity with the respective collective agreements shall be void.

Article 8 - Trade union rights

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 6 of the list of issues

35. Since the very beginning of the 20th century, it has been the custom on the Icelandic labour market that the organizations of the social partners negotiate workers' wages and terms and other working conditions in the course of free collective bargaining. Extremely powerful organizations of the social partners function on the Icelandic labour market particularly the workers' organizations. Thus, the Government of Iceland has taken the view that collective bargaining is entirely in the hands of the social partners, without intervention by the Government.

36. Furthermore, the organizations of the social partners have agreed between themselves most of the rules applying to the Icelandic labour market, and it may be said that the labour market system is based, in all its essentials, on agreement between these parties themselves. On occasion, the social partners have requested the intervention of the Government in the form of legislation applying to the labour market. In such cases the Government has given particular priority to close consultations with the social partners regarding the formulation of such rules.

In order to encourage and promote the full development and utilization of machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers' and workers' organizations, a special system of collective bargaining has been developed in a close co-operation with the social partners. The social partners have the choice of referring their disputes in collective bargaining to a special Mediation and Conciliation Officer under the Act No. 80/1938. The officer's function is to act as a mediator in industrial disputes between the partners if this assistance is requested by the partners themselves. It is therefore made a condition for the lawful calling of a work stoppage that negotiations, or attempts at negotiations on the demands presented, must have taken place and proved unsuccessful despite the mediation of the Mediation and Conciliation Officer. The proposal to call a work stoppage must state clearly the persons it is primarily intended to involve and when it is intended to take place.

37. Under the structure of the Icelandic labour market, strikes are viewed as collective action by the workers in cases of conflicts of interest. Under Article 14 of the Trade Unions and Industrial Disputes Act, No. 80/1938, trade unions, employers' organizations and individual employers are permitted to engage in strikes and lockouts in order to press for

the achievement of their demands in industrial disputes and to protect their rights under the Act.

38. If the State Mediator's attempts at conciliation prove fruitless, s/he may submit a compromise proposal to resolve the industrial dispute. The compromise proposal shall be submitted to the employees' trade unions or federations of trade unions and employers, or an individual employer if only one employer is involved in an industrial dispute, for approval or rejection. The State Mediator shall consult the parties' negotiating committees before submitting a compromise proposal.

39. The Government has regarded it as a priority to maintain close collaboration with the social partners on these issues. During this regular consultation between the Government and the Social Partners there have been no proposals to change the current procedures for collective bargaining.

Article 9 - The right to social security

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 7 of the list of issues

40. During the severe restraint measures which became necessary following the economic crisis in 2008 the Government's priority was to safeguard welfare services with an emphasis on protecting lower income groups by redistribution through the tax system and the social protection system along with debt relief measures especially for low and middle income groups. This included the raising of the tax relief for interest cost of housing loans, increased level of social security benefits and significant raise of the minimum pension guarantee. As a result the percentage of those below the risk of poverty threshold is in fact considerably lower than during the boom years.

Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold 2004-2011 (per cent)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
40%	2,6	2,8	2,8	2,2	2,4	2,5	3	3,1
50%	5,5	5,1	5,3	5	4,5	5	5,4	5,4
60%	10	9,7	9,6	10,1	10,1	10,2	9,8	9,2
70%	18,5	16,7	17,2	18	17,3	19	16,6	16,4

Table no. 4- At-risk-of-poverty threshold, Statistics Iceland 2012

41. Although the general percentage of those below the risk of poverty threshold has come down there are however indications that the percentage of single parent families around the risk of poverty is still quite high. Improved fiscal position makes it possible to emphasize improvement in conditions for families with children in the fiscal budget for 2013. The budget includes substantial raise of child benefits and housing benefits and payment during maternity/paternity will also be increased significantly.

Article 10 - Protection of the family, mothers and children

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 8 of the list of issues

42. As described in paragraphs 169-171 of Iceland's fourth periodic report, the Committee on Penal Issues examined and gave an opinion on whether a specific provision on domestic violence should be added to the General Penal Code, if general provisions on bodily harm were sufficient or if other aspects could be relevant. The Committee examined the then current legislative framework on domestic violence in other Nordic countries and compared it to Icelandic legal and judicial framework. Rather than following the Swedish

legislation, the Committee came to the conclusion that an amendment, like the Amendment Act No. 27/2006 as described in paragraphs 170 - 171 would strengthen the legal grounds of criminal investigations of cases of domestic violence and reflect the serious effect that close relations between perpetrators and victims of a crime can have in heavier sentences for such crimes.

43. The Committee listed four main reasons for this conclusion: (1) a comprehensive definition of the term that will take to every act that can constitute domestic violence will be complicated. The real core of the term would be the relationship between the parties in question but not the act in question as such. (2) The Committee found no signs from judicial practice that the legal framework is lacking in describing unwanted acts that can take place in close relationships for a longer or shorter period, and referred to Supreme Court case from the same year where the Court stated that: "...repeated violence within the home is suited to cause serious harm to the mental health of the victim of such acts..." (3) That a legal definition of domestic violence that constitutes that the act has to have certain negative consequences for the victim in order for a specific domestic violence provision to apply, could prove to become very burdensome for the victim and other close to him or her during the process of a criminal investigation. (4) The wording of a specific provision on domestic violence would without a doubt prove to be open for assessment in application and thus hardly constitute a significantly clear provision.

44. In 2006 the Government launched an action plan containing 37 actions to fight sexual and domestic violence. The chief objective of the plan is to combat domestic and sexual violence directed towards women and children and to improve services for victims of such violence and those who are at risk. The actions include strengthening preventative measures, training staff, ensuring appropriate assistance to victims and breaking the vicious cycle of violence by improving treatment available to perpetrators.

45. Based on the 2006 action plan, five books on violence in intimate relationships have been published, one textbook for university and four for civil servants working in the field. Several studies have also been conducted on the subject; one wide-ranging study revealed that 42 per cent of Icelandic women had, since the age of 16, been subjected to violence, threat or physical contact of a sexual nature that caused distress. Also, during their lifetime 22 per cent of women had experienced violence in close relationships. Four studies on the provision of public services for victims of violence in intimate relationships have also been conducted.

46. Actions from the plan such as systematic efforts aimed at educating the police on domestic violence and violence against children were conducted as well as establishing a precise set of working rules on the investigation of sexual offences for the police.

47. Awareness-raising campaigns in order to raise awareness among the public on violence in close relationships were held in 2010.

48. A new action plan is now under preparation. The new plan will emphasize examining gender-based acts of violence and their prosecution and handling in the judicial system, but few cases of this nature go all the way through the judicial system.

49. The provisions in the penal code regarding domestic violence, rape and other violence apply equally to immigrants as well as people with Icelandic citizenship. No specific measures have been taken to change this. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised that foreign women coming to Iceland based on a family formation by marriage may in some instances be in a vulnerable position and possibly stay in violent relationships for the statutory period to apply for a residence permit. To respond to this, amendments were made to the Act on Foreigners in 2010, stipulating that in cases where the foreigner is a victim of domestic violence that in itself can be a special ground for prolonging the validity of a residence permit.

50. Representatives from the Women Shelter, Directorate of Immigration, The Icelandic Human Right Centre, The Ministry of Welfare, Police, Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network, Reykjavik city, Multicultural Centre and Gender Equality Centre edited together a brochure on the rights of female which focused on immigrant women. In the brochure the focus was on their rights and then especially their legal rights regarding marriages, divorces, custody, finance, domestic violence and how and where to seek assistance. The brochure was published in nine languages and distributed in health care centres, social service centres and at the District Magistrate amongst many other places.

51. Small cards have been published where numbers of the rape trauma service centre, Women's Shelter, Emergency line, Red Cross and Counselling Centre for Survivors of Sexual Abuse are listed. The cards are in five languages and have been distributed in various places such as hotels and health care centres.

52. The Centre for Gender Equality cooperates with various schools, institutions and others for raising awareness on gender equality issues, including combating negative gender stereotypes. The Centre provides trainings and lectures on gender stereotypes, gender based violence, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, amongst many other topics, in addition to organizing public events and conferences on various topics. The Centre is also in cooperation with a few municipalities in providing training for educators on gender mainstreaming in their work.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 of the list of issues

53. Investigations of sexual crimes against children are generally subject to the same rules and criteria as other criminal investigations. However, in a few, but significant respects such investigations differ from other criminal investigations, as a result of direct statutory requirements and the nature of the cases and the restrictions that ensue from the fact that a large number of the victims in the cases, owing to their youth, cannot report or fully understand that they have been victims of a crime. The Icelandic police force has investigators with expert knowledge and experience in the field in order to conduct investigations of sexual crimes against children. An important factor on all stages of the process is close cooperation between child protection services and the police.

54. One of the most important specialized services with regard to the issue of child sexual abuse is the services provided by the Children's House (Barnahus). The Children's House is a child-friendly, multiagency and interdisciplinary facility for the investigation of suspected child sexual abuse cases as well as providing specialized treatment and counselling services for the child victim and his or her family.

55. Iceland ratified of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) in 2011. A part of the legal amendments in order for the ratification the General Penal Code was amended in June 2012 in cases regarding child prostitution, pornography and trafficking in order for the statute of limitation only to start when the child has turned 18 years old, irrespective of the child's age when the violation took place. Internet grooming, the storage and the viewing of child Pornography or sexually explicit material including children, or people portrait as children was made punishable under the Act.

56. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Welfare signed a three-year agreement on 17 April 2012 about cooperation in social awakening when it comes to sexual crimes against children. The agreement is a part of the Government's actions in connection with Iceland's ratification of the Lanzarote Convention. The main goal of the project is to promote cooperation to prevent sexual abuse and sexual exploitation against children and to launch social awakening by directing information about sexual offences against children to the children

themselves and direct information to people who have direct communication with children in connection to their work.

57. In the year 2012, Iceland 20 Million ISK will be allocated to education in primary school (age 6-16 years old) and 5 Million ISK for translation and education for judges, police forces and the prosecution service about the Convention and rules and legislations concerning child friendly community. In 2013 and 2014 Iceland plans to dedicate 16 Million ISK to the projects each year, mostly on education directed towards students in primary schools. A Steering Committee with representatives from each of the Ministries manage the project that will be carried out in collaboration with public professionals and organizations which concern children's protection against sexual offences. In three years' time the success of the project will be evaluated and decision made about the future of the project.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 10 of the list of issues

58. The Government has made various efforts in combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. Two important international instruments have been ratified, namely the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Optional Protocol on trafficking in Women and Children in 2010, and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in February 2012. A part of the ratification procedure were amendments of the General Penal Code penalizing the purchase of prostitution as well as criminalizing the beneficiaries and perpetrators of trafficking and prostitution. The amendments are to further strengthen the protection of women in vulnerable situations.

59. Iceland has put together an Expert and co-ordination team on trafficking in human beings to follow up a national action plan against Trafficking. The Plan is from 2009 and has come into action in various ways, among others in training of law enforcement personnel and border guards on Trafficking in Human Beings. The police have issued a detailed booklet and working rules on detecting and responding in possible cases of trafficking and prostitution. These include detailed information on pertinent legislation, both national and international, guidelines on how to identify victims of trafficking as well as the treatment of victims in cases of detection. In addition the Police Academy curriculum takes note of the working rules.

60. Iceland has an extensive cooperation program and participates actively with Frontex, with special emphasis on human rights as regards border controls. The border police at Keflavík International Airport has received training on human rights and human trafficking, e.g., identification of victims of human rights. In the year 2009 the Police College hosted an awareness seminar on trafficking in human beings with participant from the Police, the now Ministry of the Interior, and the board of the Icelandic Police officers trade union. In the years 2007, 2008 and 2009 Iceland did co-organize and host CEPOL-courses for 60 participants from Iceland and many EU-countries on measures against organized crime and about analysing crime trends in Europe.

61. In annual courses designed for detectives and investigators within the Police, lecture time is dedicated to organized crime discussions and awareness of trafficking in human beings. In addition, the Icelandic National Police College sent one deputy police commissioner and two police officers to the CEPOL – course Trafficking in Human Beings in Lithuania in 2010. That was done in order to build up more knowledge of the phenomenon inside the Icelandic Police. Since then the College has informed the Police in Iceland about similar CEPOL-courses and advertised them inside the Police organization in Iceland. In December 2010 the High command of the College met with the Expert and co-ordination team on trafficking in human beings and following that the College did make a new strategy plan on capacity building in that area of the Icelandic police through training and education. The strategy plan was launched in March 2011.

62. One action in the National Action Plan from 2009 is launching an education and awareness campaign aimed at possible buyers of pornography, prostitution and other sexual service about the connection between human trafficking, pornography and sexual service. In this context, a special emphasis is to be given to young men in order to prevent that they would possibly buy prostitution later on in life. In 2011, an Icelandic NGO fighting against prostitution and human trafficking conducted a public awareness raising campaign aimed at young people. The campaign was funded by the Ministry of the Interior with reference to the National Action Plan. The campaign was a video competition, where a price was given for the best video written, produced and conducted by young people on the topic of prostitution and/or human trafficking. The video were posted on the internet where they are accessible.⁷

Article 11 - The right to an adequate standard of living

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 11 of the list of issues

63. In dealing with the effects of the financial crisis the Government has emphasized redistribution through various measures to soften the financial difficulties of low and middle income groups. These measures have in general helped low income families with children. The number of single parent families under the risk of poverty threshold is however of concern. Improved fiscal position makes it possible to emphasize improvement in conditions for families with children in the fiscal budget for 2013. The budget includes substantial raise of child benefits and housing benefits and payment during maternity/paternity will also be increased significantly.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 12 of the list of issues

64. The action plan established following the 2009 report of the Welfare Watch included the following actions:

- Monitoring the consequences of the financial crises on individuals and families, with a special focus on families and children and those most vulnerable in society.
- Development of „Social Indicators“ to monitor social and economic effects of the crisis on families.
- Measures to help those without work to stay active while searching for work
- Maintaining good access to health care and social services.
- Efficient debt relief measures.
- Various means to create more jobs.

65. The Government has strived to reach the goals outlined in the action plan and has on the whole been successful. Social Indicators have been developed. Effort has been made to maintain access to social services and health care, with emphasis on primary health care. Efficient debt relief measures have been enacted and efforts made to create jobs and keep job seekers active, as described above in the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues. The main concern is the unemployment rate, which is still higher than it has been for a long time in Iceland, although it is lower than in most European countries. It is however coming slowly down (see above the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues).

⁷ http://www.sterk.is/efni/okkar_vorur.

66. As mentioned above one of the proposals of the Welfare Watch was, to develop "Social Indicators". The Social Indicators were amongst other things meant to identify and understand current and future health and wellbeing needs of the population, to monitor the welfare in times of crisis, to follow development over time and to be a ground for social political decision making. At least twenty institutions and thirty specialists and academics in the field of health and social care participated in the making of the Social Indicators. They will be housed at Statistics Iceland, which will be responsible for their regular updates. A focus group with partners from ministries, institutions and universities will be responsible for the development of the Social Indicators in co-operation with Statistics Iceland. The Social Indicators are perceived as an important social political tool, which will be published on a yearly basis and more often where possible, alongside the publication of economic indicators.

Article 12 - The right to physical and mental health

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 13 of the list of issues

67. After the financial crisis in 2008, the Government was obliged to make cuts in the state budget. The cuts in welfare expenditures have however been less than in other public expenditures and efforts have been made to shelter health care with emphasis on primary health care and the health care of children.

The Ministry of Welfare - Expenditure on Health Care and Social Services 2006-2012.

	2006	2008	2010	2012	Change 06-12	
					m.kr.	%
General hospital services	57.041	60.243	50.511	47.499	-9.541	-17%
Specialized hospital services	757	920	854	790	32	4%
Nursing and convalescent home services	29.369	29.488	26.801	27.225	-2.144	-7%
General medical services	13.074	14.090	13.142	14.417	1.343	10%
Private practicing specialists	5.377	6.419	6.391	6.036	659	12%
Specialized health care	396	512	426	425	29	7%
Dental services	1.828	1.710	1.405	1.551	-277	-15%
Paramedical services and other medical services	2.063	2.318	1.744	1.705	-358	-17%
Medical products, appliances and equipment	15.227	18.350	18.855	17.558	2.331	15%
Health care n.e.c.	2.973	3.251	3.509	3.081	108	4%
	128.105	137.300	123.638	120.286	-7.819	-6%
Sickness-, maternity- and disability benefits	11.257	12.912	11.039	9.370	-1.887	-17%
Old age-, disability and widow pensions	55.623	61.306	56.672	65.079	9.456	17%
Unemployment benefits	3.080	4.225	27.915	20.023	16.943	550%
Family- and children benefits	1.911	2.167	2.038	2.091	180	9%
Social protection n.e.c.	1.125	1.406	1.611	1.671	546	49%
Other welfare institutions	1.775	2.026	1.729	1.199	-577	-32%
Welfare services n.e.c.	1.482	1.908	1.739	1.941	460	31%
	76.253	85.951	102.742	101.374	25.121	33%

Table no. 5- Expenditure on Health Care and Social Services 2006-2012 at 2011 price (Million ISK). The Ministry of Welfare

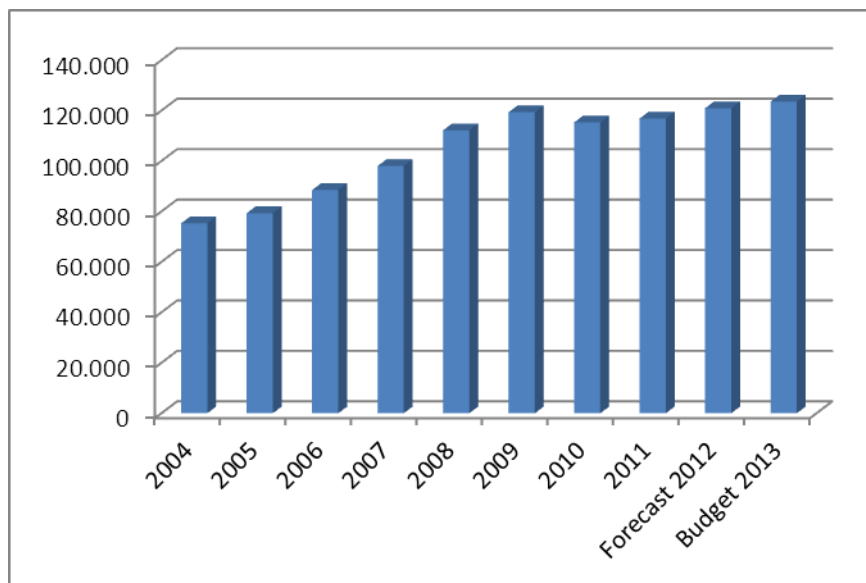


Table no. 6- Expenditure on Health Care 2004-2013. State budget 2013

68. Statistics on longevity and infant mortality rate have consistently ranked the Icelandic health service among the best in the world. In 2010 Iceland ranked no four in life expectancy at birth and had the lowest infant mortality rate among the OECD countries. Life expectancy has increased in 2011 and infant mortality has continued to decrease. It has been a challenge to maintain that high standard with reduced resources and manning level. Health care providers have however put in a greater effort and use of resources has been improved. Health authorities are monitoring the service to ensure that the citizens have access to necessary health services. In spite of reduced resources and manning levels the health service has managed to maintain high quality healthcare through the crisis and most measures and indicators suggest that the overall productivity has increased.

69. Specific efforts have been made to protect and strengthen health service for children, in particular with respect to childrens mental health and their access to pshycological service. During the years of 2008 to 2011 the financial contribution through the state budget to the Capital Area Healthcare Centres (Reykjavík and the neighbouring municipalities) was raised by 68 million ISK in order to provide more comprehensive psychological and social support for children. In 2008 the budget for the Capital Area Healthcare Centres was raised by 38 million ISK to shorten waiting lists for children specific healthcare. The state budget was again increased in 2011 by 30 million ISK to provide more comprehensive children specific care. In 2008 the funding for the Children and Teenage Mental Health Division of the University Hospital (BUGL) was increased by 29 million ISK specifically to shorten waiting lists and increase access to mental health professionals. In 2009 funding for BUGL was further increased by 30 million ISK specifically to shorten the wait for treatment and in 2011 by 30 million ISK to support mental and social services provided. Funding of Hringur Children's Hospital (a division within the National University Hospital of Iceland) was increased by 10 million ISK in 2011 specifically for treatment and therapy for obese children.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 14 of the list of issues

70. Primary healthcare is provided free of charge and other health services for children at a very low cost. Parents and children who do not speak Icelandic have the right to

interpretation according to the Act on the Rights of Patients. However, in practice, rules and regulations about interpreter service are lacking. Standardized rules regarding interpretation or information about the health system for immigrants and their children do not exist. Each health centre, school, public or local authority has different procedures regarding disclosure of information to children of immigrants and their families. There are many things that can affect them, such as the time of arrival to the country, the children's origin, what the child's first language is etc. The institution in question (the hospital or clinic) will decide whether interpreter's services are provided.

71. Generally there is little information material on health care in other languages than Icelandic for immigrants and their children. Information for children about dental health is however available in several languages. It has been observed that children of foreign origin are much more likely to have severe tooth decay. Dental services in Iceland are provided at private dental clinics. It is the responsibility of the parents to take their children for a regular check-up with a dentist. Icelandic Health Insurance reimburses part of the cost for children, pensioners and disability pensioners. Children aged 3, 6 and 12 are entitled to a monitoring and a preventative treatment from a dentist once a year, free of charge. Special effort was made 2011 to provide all children of low income families with dental care free of charge. The campaign proved to be successful in providing parents with information in many languages and interpreter services were provided at the University of Iceland where the dental care took place. The campaign was funded by the Ministry of Welfare.

Articles 13 and 14 - The right to education

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 15 of the list of issues

72. The table below shows how expenditures of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture developed in 2007-2011. The figures are shown at each year's prices followed by 2011 prices. As the table shows, expenditure on recreational and sporting services and on primary and lower secondary education (the compulsory level) fell appreciably between 2007 and 2011. In contrast, expenditure on pre-primary education did not fall as much, as did expenditure on the upper secondary level. The preparation of the 2013 Government Budget aims to continue to ring-fence upper secondary education to the extent possible. However, the Ministry remains subject to the same general budget savings requirement. It is expected that in the year 2013 expenditure according will be approximately 1 per cent less than in 2012. From the fiscal year 2014 onwards we expect that expenditure will begin to increase again at all levels of education and, recreational and sporting services and cultural activities. Although it has been possible to run the educational system in Iceland after the financial crisis without decreasing the legal rights there has been considerable reduction from 2008 in the budget available for education for example resulting in reduction in staffing at all school levels, bigger class groups in many cases, and cancellation of courses, especially optional courses and extra-curricular activities.

<i>Public expenditure on different levels of the educational system and recreational and sporting services</i>							
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Change 2007-11	Change 2008-11
Million ISK							
Recreational and sporting services	24.436,9	26.500,9	25.851,8	27.265,5	26.670,1	9,1%	0,6%
Pre-primary education	10.384,6	12.676,0	13.442,4	12.915,7	13.028,9	25,5%	2,8%
Primary education	34.982,6	39.584,9	40.436,5	40.344,6	40.764,2	16,5%	3,0%
Lower-secondary education	15.260,7	17.301,8	17.720,2	17.521,3	17.709,9	16,0%	2,4%
Upper-secondary education	16.629,2	19.286,7	20.552,2	19.553,4	20.517,3	23,4%	6,4%
At 2011 price							
Recreational and sporting services	32.236,0	31.533,5	27.972,0	28.369,5	26.670,1	-17,3%	-15,4%
Pre-primary education	13.698,9	15.083,2	14.544,9	13.438,7	13.028,9	-4,9%	-13,6%
Primary education	46.147,4	47.102,3	43.752,8	41.978,2	40.764,2	-11,7%	-13,5%
Lower-secondary education	20.131,2	20.587,4	19.173,5	18.230,8	17.709,9	-12,0%	-14,0%
Upper-secondary education	21.936,4	22.949,3	22.237,7	20.345,1	20.517,3	-6,5%	-10,6%

Table No. 7- Public expenditure on different levels of the educational system and recreational and sporting services

73. A special welfare group is in operation within the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture the role of which is to monitor the effects of the economic situation on the functioning of the bodies under the ministry's administration, concentrating primarily on the health and stability of pupils and staff at all school levels. Recommendations and instructions have been sent to schools, institutions and organizations, and systematic data-gathering is in progress in order to process indicators.

74. An emphasis has been put on ensuring funding for upper secondary schools, as well so that pupils with disabilities have access to upper secondary schools on equal basis as the non-disabled. It has been a priority to ensure that all pupils that register to upper secondary schools are given opportunities to attend school, and this applies to all pupils from 16-18, also those with disabilities and multiple additional needs.

75. In collaboration with the City of Reykjavík, the Union of Local Authorities and sports clubs, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has monitored the functioning of the schools, including their sports and leisure activities and the drop-out rate of pupils from kindergarten to upper secondary school. Special questionnaires about pupils' levels of activity, health and stability have been sent to the schools and sports and youth organizations, and the findings of these surveys have been presented to the Welfare Watch. Various meetings and other forms of cooperation have been organized with stakeholders to monitor the consequences of the financial crisis and necessary actions taken to ensure that services are provided in spite of budgetary decrease. In this matter all stakeholders have worked together, even more in many cases than before the crisis. It can be stated that everything has been done to avoid negative effects of the crisis in the educational and the welfare system. In this context it is worth mentioning that teenagers in Iceland age 13-16 drink and smoke and use drugs much less today than they did 20 years ago. This has been investigated on a regular basis in the span of 20 years and the results are remarkable, and even after the financial crisis this positive development continued. For example almost half

of the teenagers were drunk every month 20 years ago but today only 7 per cent drink regularly. Twenty years ago over 20 per cent smoked daily, today only 3 per cent smoke daily and the same result is concerning use of drugs, such as hashish. We consider that this has been accomplished by a co-ordinated effort of all stakeholders and not least because parents are much more active today in partnership with the school and the community to maintain a drug free school.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 16 of the list of issues

76. Addressing dropout has been high on the agenda of the Icelandic Government for several years, and its importance has increased in the context of the financial crisis. To tackle the high dropout rate and its consequences, the Icelandic Government has taken measures with recent reforms throughout the education system. These include reforms in teacher education, compulsory and upper secondary education (2008) and the development of a new national curriculum and a national qualifications framework. Iceland has worked on the implementation of these reforms and is continuously strengthening upper secondary education and at the same time focusing on improving and investing in pre-primary and compulsory education. Preventing dropout and encouraging successful upper secondary completion is important for economic growth and social development.

77. To assist Iceland in responding to the challenge of high drop-out rate in upper secondary education, the OECD has assisted Iceland by working on an *OECD–Iceland Policy and Implementation Review* focused on reducing the high dropout rate in upper secondary education. This Review used the OECD review methodology that has been developed to support the design and implementation of specific education policy reforms in other countries. Earlier this year the OECD released a report based on the main outcomes of the OECD-Iceland workshop; *towards a strategy to prevent dropout in Iceland*. Following this analysis by OECD the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has established a working group to formulate and prioritize task based on the OECD analysis and available research. One of the priorities will focus on decreasing the drop out of pupils with immigrant background.

78. In recent years pupils with immigrant background have increasingly entered upper secondary schools, but still there are about 20 per cent of the pupils that don't start upper secondary schools, and increased counselling to the pupils and parents is being prepared in compulsory schools, in cooperation with stakeholders. In September 2012 the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare and many stakeholders organized a whole day conference to discuss education of immigrant pupils at all school level and in teacher training, with emphasis on the main challenges and what actions can be taken to improve the system at all levels. Following the conference the ministries plan to set up an action plan to focus on the most important issues that were raised, and among them is definitely the high drop-out rate of immigrant students from upper secondary schools.

79. The ET2020 work programme gave a mandate to the European Commission to establish, together with Member States, Thematic Working Groups to work on priority themes, including early school leaving. Iceland is participating in this working group and through its work aims to support policy development at European level and within Member States, in order to make them more efficient and effective.

80. It can also be mentioned that the project „Education is a work process” (“Nám er vinnandi vegur”) is a part of the goals in the Iceland 2020 programme, implements recommendations of a working committee of representatives from ministries, political parties, industry and student organizations. The main objective of the project is to open access to upper secondary schools for the unemployed and young people under the age of 25, to strengthen vocational education and to increase co-operation between schools and industry. The boundaries between the formal upper secondary school system and adult

education system will be made more flexible and school guidance will be made more accessible with increased funding from the Government. The project has been launched and is planned to run for three years. One of its greatest benefits so far has been to strengthen co-operation between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Welfare, the unemployment offices and the actors of the labour market, upper-secondary schools and student counsellors. Through this project more effort has been made to register all information regarding early school leaving. Reasons students have given for leaving are for example financial difficulties, educational difficulties and that the study they signed to is too hard for them. Statistics from counsellors seem to show a trend of increased number of anxiety, depression and negative consequences of long-time unemployment among students and the project is to have a positive effect on reversing this trend.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 17 of the list of issues

81. According to the Compulsory School Act municipalities shall ensure that specialist services are provided in compulsory schools, determine the organization of such services and conduce towards providing the services within the compulsory school itself. Specialist services include support for pupils and their families as well as support for compulsory school activities and its personnel. The Ministry has written a regulation no. 584/2010 on specialist services both for pre-primary schools and Compulsory schools where the services that should be provided are described.

82. A new regulation no. 585/2010 for pupils with special needs in compulsory education and regulation no. 230/2012 for students with special needs in upper secondary schools stipulate that all students are entitled to education and support programmes in accordance with their assessed needs in inclusive educational settings. Students with special needs are identified to have difficulty learning because of specific learning disabilities, emotional or social difficulties and / or disabilities according to the act no. 59/1992 on the Affairs of People with Disabilities, pupils with dyslexia, pupils suffering from long term illnesses and pupils with health related special needs, have the right to special study support, according to evaluation of their special needs.

83. In the above regulation 585/2010 it is stated that schools should make a reception program for students with special needs. Also, schools should, in cooperation with parents, work on an individual transition plan for pupils with the most severe special needs within primary or special schools to make the transfer to the next school level more coherent and smooth.

84. In the regulation no. 230/2012 about pupils with special needs in upper secondary schools that attend special programmes for the disabled it is stated that an individual transition plan should be written, in partnership with the parents. They are to work on the plan during the study programme and shall accompany the student when he moves to the next level, such as for further study or employment.

85. A new regulation has now been released concerning compulsory schooling of foster children with the main goal to secure appropriate education for those children that often live temporarily in foster homes in other municipalities, and their schooling was often disrupted during foster care. This is a great improvement, organized in cooperation with other ministries and various stakeholders.

86. A policy regarding deaf, hearing-impaired and deaf blind pupils and students is being formulated and is expected to lead to improvements with respect to individual organizations. This work is currently in progress and involves co-operation between representatives from various ministries and stakeholders. It is planned to make similar policies for other groups of pupils with special needs and the next group will be pupils with language disorders and those who need speech therapy of any kind.

87. It is also worth mentioning that Iceland has actively participated in the work of The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education that is an independent and self-governing organization established by member countries to act as their platform for collaboration regarding the development of provision for learners with special educational needs. The Agency is maintained by the Ministries of Education in the participating countries as well as supported by the European Union Institutions via the Jean Monnet programme under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme. The Agency facilitates the collection, processing and transfer of European level and country specific information and offers the member countries the opportunity to learn from each other through different types of knowledge and experience exchange. The short and long term work programmes of the Agency reflect both the member countries' priorities and agreed EU policies regarding learners with special educational needs and the promotion of their full participation within mainstream education and training. The participation in the works of the Agency has had a great impact on the development in the field of policy making for learners with special educational needs.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 18 of the list of issues

88. Pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic are entitled to learn Icelandic as a second language in compulsory and upper secondary schools. The aim is that the pupils will be actively bilingual and that they can be educated in general schools, and can participate actively in the Icelandic society. This subject has developed in this country on both levels in recent years and the National Curriculum Guide is now under revision by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

89. Parliamentary Resolution on an action plan on immigrant issues was passed on the 29 of May 2008. The action plan is divided into sixteen chapters with over ninety actions. Three of the chapters specifically take measures regarding immigrant children, namely Interpreting services, Education and Child Welfare.

90. The school system, i.e. the preschools, primary and lower secondary (compulsory-level; to age 15) and upper secondary schools have a great responsibility regarding immigrants' education and adaptation, and also as regards preparing the entire younger generation of Iceland for life in a more diverse society, in which the ability to see matters in an international dimension may be crucial for the development of the economy and for Iceland's position in the international arena in the future. This constitutes a valuable opportunity to encourage young immigrants to become fully-fledged representatives of Iceland through the combination of a sound knowledge of the values of Iceland's democratic society and their knowledge of other societies and their languages and cultures.

91. The principal task of the school system in this respect is first and foremost to give support to civic education, provide opportunities for learning Icelandic, enable immigrants to pursue studies in other subjects, provide them with the appropriate study materials, work to promote their assimilation, eliminate prejudice and antagonism towards them, and to educate teachers to meet the more varied needs of their pupils. Working schedules of preschools should include, amongst other things, reception plans for children whose mother tongue is not Icelandic. The compulsory schools should then receive these pupils in accordance with a reception plan drawn up either by the school or by the local authority. Provisions on these matters should be included in the agreements of the upper secondary schools.

92. With the implementation of The Preschool act No. 90/2008, The Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008, The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008, and the national curriculum, the rights of pupils of foreign origin in compulsory- and upper secondary schools have been clarified. Considerable development has been in publication of educational materials in teaching Icelandic as a second language at all above mentioned

school levels. With the regulatory review, mother tongues (other than Icelandic) have been recognized as a valid school subject in the compulsory and upper secondary schools.

93. Regulation no. 654/2009 stipulates the rights of students in upper secondary schools to learn Icelandic. Students whose mother tongue is not Icelandic have the right to learn Icelandic as a second language. This involves training students in Icelandic, and to prepare them to take an active role in Icelandic society, give them cultural competence, literacy and knowledge in all subjects. All schools shall develop a reception plan for pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic which includes organizing an individual curriculum that takes into account the background of students, language skills, skills in other subject areas and describes how the right to interpretation, translation and other kind of support according to pupils needs is covered.

94. There are also provisions in the general curricula of primary and secondary schools that students whose native language is not Icelandic may be exempted from learning a particular subject and Danish is specifically mentioned. Such exemptions provided in compulsory schools also apply to upper secondary schools. Compulsory schools may recognize pupils' skills in their mother language as part of the compulsory education. There are no specific central provisions on mother language education for students of foreign origin, but according to a survey conducted a few years ago almost half of the students of foreign origin received some mother tongue education at compulsory school level.

Article 15 - Cultural rights

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 19 of the list of issues

95. In many municipalities the participation of children and young people in sport and youth clubs is subsidized substantially up to the age of 18. This is probably the largest drug prevention programme that has been carried out in Iceland. This has made it easier for all parents to allow their children to participate in youth, sports and cultural activities that they choose. This has been very successful and the budgets have not been cut after the financial crisis.

96. The municipalities and sport clubs in Iceland have been undertaken projects that specifically aim to increase the number of practitioners from among immigrant children. Regarding families with financially weak background the social services, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations have in some municipalities assisted families.

97. Sports for the elderly are also worth mentioning, there have been established many clubs for elderly people whose main objective is to promote social activity for elderly people and sport activities are often a very important part of such club activities. The sport union is working very hard to increase the number of available sport activities for people with disabilities.

98. Reykjavik City Library runs several multicultural projects where the goal is to promote awareness of the positive values of cultural diversity in the society. The library puts an emphasis on cooperating with social service centres, schools, organizations and individuals from all over the world living in Reykjavik. The IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto is used as a guideline in this work. All Reykjavik's citizens are the target group for Reykjavik City Library's multicultural projects. The main objective is to make a visit to Reykjavik City Library a part of the daily life of immigrants, as well as other citizens, and to deliver the message that the library offers a variety of services that are available to everyone. Similar projects have also been organized in other libraries. Most museums offer free admission for children and reduced admission fee for older persons and disabled persons. They offer as well one free admission one day a week.

99. Ever since 1995, the compulsory schools have been provided with high quality concerts specially designed for children where entertainment and educational values go hand in hand to create an exceptional experience. The music itself is varied and performed by top of the line professionals. The key factor of the project is the children's experience and great care is taken that it is as wonderful as possible. There are 176 elementary schools in Iceland and normally about 145-150 schools participate in the project, - each school being visited twice a year if possible. But as consequences of the economic crass in Iceland in 2008 many Communes did not order concerts, so in 2009 there were only 108 concerts in 82 schools performed by 9 musical groups, and in 2010 it was about the same. These concerts are free for the children and all pupils in the schools attend the concerts.

100. In addition, the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra has participated in the Music For All project and each winter invites children in pre schools and primary schools in the Reykjavík area for a concert held in the Symphony orchestra hall in Reykjavík. The orchestra also performs for those who do not live in the city, and makes annual stops throughout the country, with an emphasis on having as many children attend as possible, even sometimes performing especially for younger audiences.
