



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 March 2024

Original: English
English, French and Spanish only

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Seventy-sixth session

9–27 September 2024

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

Replies of Iceland to the list of issues in relation to its fifth periodic report*

[Date received: 26 February 2024]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. General information

Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues (E/C.12/ISL/Q/5)

1. Regarding the protection of economic, social and cultural rights in the Icelandic Constitution and in general legislation, reference is made to Iceland's previous reports to the Committee (see e.g., paragraphs 3 to 7 of the third report and paragraphs 3 to 5 of the fifth report). Statistical data and examples of cases in which the provisions of the Covenant were invoked by the courts, other tribunals or administrative authorities are not available.

2. When an individual considers that their rights have been infringed, effective remedies are guaranteed before competent judicial, administrative, and legislative authorities. A person who considers that their rights have been infringed by the administrative authorities, such as public bodies or administrative committees, is generally able to make an appeal to a higher authority in order to obtain a revision, or an annulment if the act in question is contrary to constitutional principles. The higher authority is usually a government ministry or a particular complaints committee with the role of resolving such appeals. This right of appeal, and other rules intended to provide security under the law when administrative functions are being exercised, is guaranteed by the Administrative Procedure Act No 37/1993. Moreover, any person who feels unfairly treated by state or local authorities can lodge a complaint with the Althingi Ombudsman.

3. Individuals who consider their rights to have been violated have access to domestic courts. Under Article 60 of the Constitution, the use of administrative powers can be subject to judicial review, and applications can be made for the invalidation of decisions made by administrative authorities if it is possible to demonstrate that they contravene the human rights provisions of the Constitution. In addition, individuals are guaranteed access to the courts under Article 70 of the Constitution. All individuals involved in judicial proceedings can apply for legal aid. A Legal Aid Committee reviews and assesses applications for legal aid on the basis of the merits of the case and the applicant's financial eligibility.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues

4. The Prime Minister initiated work on a National Human Rights Action Plan in the spring of 2023. The green paper on human rights served as basis for this effort, containing the outcome of surveying the state of human rights, and emphasis put on public consultation, as well as consultation with representatives of institutions, line ministries, human rights organisations and other interested parties. The Prime Minister's Office held well attended open consultation meetings on human rights in all parts of the country, with the Prime Minister taking part in every meeting.

5. The Prime Minister presented a bill on an independent human rights institution to parliament in September 2023. Under the bill, the role of the Icelandic Human Rights Institution will be to promote and protect human rights in Iceland. The explanatory notes to the bill note specifically that the notion of human rights refers to rights as they are defined in the Constitution and international conventions, with explicit reference to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in this context.

Reply to paragraph 4 of the list of issues

6. Directive 2014/95/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups was incorporated with Article 66(d) of the Act on Annual Accounts No 3/2006. According to the provision, the management report in the annual statement is to contain information to the extent necessary for an understanding of the undertaking's development, performance, position and impact of its activity. The information shall relate to, as a minimum, environmental, social and employee matters, as well as policy regarding respect for human rights and how the undertaking counteracts, anti-corruption and bribery matters. The aim is to incorporate Directive (EU) 2022/2464 as regards corporate

sustainability reporting (CSRD) by introducing a bill to amend the aforementioned legislation.

7. The Department of Business Affairs and Tourism in the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs is the National Contact Point (NPC) in Iceland with respect to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct. The department assists undertakings and their stakeholders in taking the appropriate measures to promote compliance with the guidelines and is intended as a forum for settlement when resolving issues which may arise during the implementation and application of these guidelines.

8. In order for Iceland to fulfil its duties according to the above-mentioned guidelines, and in the light of new guidelines from the OECD with respect to biodiversity, technology, ethics, the environment and so forth, the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs has decided to create a steering group composed of the main stakeholders in that regard. The steering group is intended to advise the government and engage in dialogue regarding the application and implementation of the above-mentioned OECD guidelines. The group also is intended, among other things, to prepare an annual promotional plan and procedural rules for addressing issues which might be brought to the Icelandic NCP. Furthermore, its role is to advise the Icelandic NCP regarding Iceland's role in relation to the OECD guidelines and provide information and training to businesses and other stakeholders.

9. Work has begun on developing an action programme on business and human rights in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This work is in its first phase and the ministry is currently working on the second and third section of the first phase, i.e., to create a platform for the relevant state entities and non-public stakeholders. Appointing a steering group or a working group that is to be involved in preparing a national action plan is under consideration. As regards non-public stakeholders, the ministry is also considering a briefing in the autumn of 2023 where attention will be brought to issues relating to business and human rights, and the process for creating a national action plan on business and human rights.

Reply to paragraph 5 of the list of issues

10. The Icelandic government presented a Climate Action Plan in September 2018. The plan was the first fully funded long-term comprehensive plan, with a substantial increase in government funding of key mitigation measures. An updated version of the Climate Action Plan was presented in June 2020, introducing new and elaborated measures and increased funding. The updated plan also contained significantly improved analysis estimating the individual and collective mitigation gains of the actions presented. Since then, the plans measures have been further implemented and new measures developed. The current plan includes 50 ongoing measures. The plan and its measures reflect comments and suggestions received, and the conclusions of a consultation process with stakeholders and civil society. Work is currently underway to further update the plan with the aim of publishing the most recent update by the end of 2023.

11. The Climate Action Plan is Iceland's main instrument to reach its commitment in the Paris Agreement, specifically its emissions reduction goals for 2030 in collaboration with the EU and Norway. It is also the main instrument to reach Iceland's stated goal of carbon neutrality by 2040. Emphasis is put on a rapid clean energy transition in transport and increased efforts in the LULUCF sector, where Iceland has great mitigation potential in afforestation, revegetation, and wetland reclamation. The plan, however, addresses all major sources and sinks, and outlines climate mitigation actions in transport, fisheries, energy, industry, chemicals, agriculture, waste management and LULUCF. The plan is organised by how the measures relate to Iceland's commitments, as well as by sources of emissions.

Reply to paragraph 5 (a) of the list of issues

12. The Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate is required by Iceland's climate law to regularly make a scientific report on the ecological and social impact of climate change in Iceland. The Meteorological Office is given a mandate of oversight for the process and an

ad hoc scientific committee based on diverse nominations with respective scientists is typically appointed. One such committee has been working since 2021 on the fourth scientific report forthcoming in October 2023. The latest report acknowledges connections between the impact of climate change and other issues such as poverty, hunger and health. During the working phase of the forthcoming fourth report the scientific committee called for expert consultations on issues such as gender, equality, just transition, small communities and public health.

13. Iceland adopted its first National Adaptation Strategy in 2021. It includes:

(a) Core values for adaptation measures and other work related to climate hazards to be based on, e.g., different scenarios where the worst case and social impacts of climate change are *inter alia* taken into account, especially for vulnerable groups; the connection of climate hazards to social justice and public health; and analyses of financial and macroeconomic impacts;

(b) Core goals for the strategy, e.g.: for efforts to adapt to climate change to contribute to a just adaptation.

14. It is the role of the Prime Minister's Office to ensure a just transition for everyone, from the current to a greener economy. A representative from the PMO chairs the project Not Just a Green Transition (NJUST). The project aims to provide knowledge and recommendations on how to engage all Nordic citizens in a green transition that transforms the Nordic region into the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. With one year left of the research project, they are approaching the end deliverable: a policy proposal toolbox. The toolbox will contain information, policy proposals, and measures to reduce the potentially negative spatial and social impacts of the green transition.

15. The Icelandic government has prioritised assessing the quality of life, well-being and sustainability of the population beyond using economic measures such as GDP. National well-being indicators have been developed through a collaboration among the Prime Minister's Office, Statistics Iceland, and other parties. These indicators are grouped into three sub-components: social indicators, economic metrics, and environmental metrics, with 40 indicators in total. One of these indicators is emissions of greenhouse gases, but there are also indicators for air quality and protected areas. This has been prioritised by participating in international cooperation and by developing a more robust data collection and measurement system. This involves collaborating with governments in countries such as Finland, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and New Zealand to form the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo). However, more data is needed on such non-economic measures, and utilising existing data remains a challenge.

Reply to paragraph 5 (b) of the list of issues

16. Iceland's first National Adaptation Plan is currently in its preparatory phase based on Iceland's NAS with a view to enter into its first planning phase later in 2023, and its first implementation phase in 2025. A stakeholder engagement process underpinning the NAP process was carried out from December 2022 to June 2023, and designed to include a diverse set of stakeholders accounting for the different economic, social and cultural impacts of climate change.

Reply to paragraph 5 (c) of the list of issues

17. Following extreme weather and considerable infrastructure and property damage in December 2019 the Icelandic government decided to accentuate civil protection and preparedness. The government founded a working group tasked with analysing the current situation and suggesting amendments to important infrastructures. The suggestions of the working group i.a. led to important amendments to the Icelandic Civil Protection Act, which were adopted by the parliament in the summer of 2022. The Ministry of Justice continues to closely monitor the Icelandic civil protection and preparedness system and its capacity to tackle various threats, including natural disasters. In the fall of 2024, the Minister of Justice

will present another legislative proposal to make further changes to the Icelandic Civil Protection Act.

18. The Icelandic government issued a new civil protection policy in March 2021. The policy is extensive and prescribes goals for strengthening civil protection and preparedness in the coming years. According to the policy, Iceland will increase emphasis on reinforcing civil protection and preparedness with various development work, including the design and implementation of a legal framework for Host Nation Support. The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police will, in cooperation with other relevant authorities and crisis responders, prepare extensive guidelines on Host Nation Support. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice will, in cooperation with other relevant authorities and crisis responders, issue rules on receiving Host Nation Support. In the coming months, a thorough analysis will be conducted on whether Icelandic laws and regulations restrict in any way the receiving of international support, and, if applicable suggest, amendments.

Reply to paragraph 5 (d) of the list of issues

19. The National Adaptation Strategy speaks of the need to understand complicated risks, with slow-onset impacts being a sub-category to that. Many institutions have been called to the table in the ongoing work on climate change adaptation, while the formal tasking of a consortium of institutions is still underway as part of the first adaptation action plan of the forthcoming NAP.

20. The Meteorological Office operates a National Climate Service Centre, established in 2021, to coordinate information on the impacts of climate change and *inter alia* support government decision-making on climate change adaptation. On the municipal level, the Met Office has partnered with the Icelandic Planning Agency and the Regional Development Institute to develop guidelines for municipalities to evaluate and respond to climate-related risks.

II. Issues regarding the general provisions of the Covenant (Articles 1 to 5)

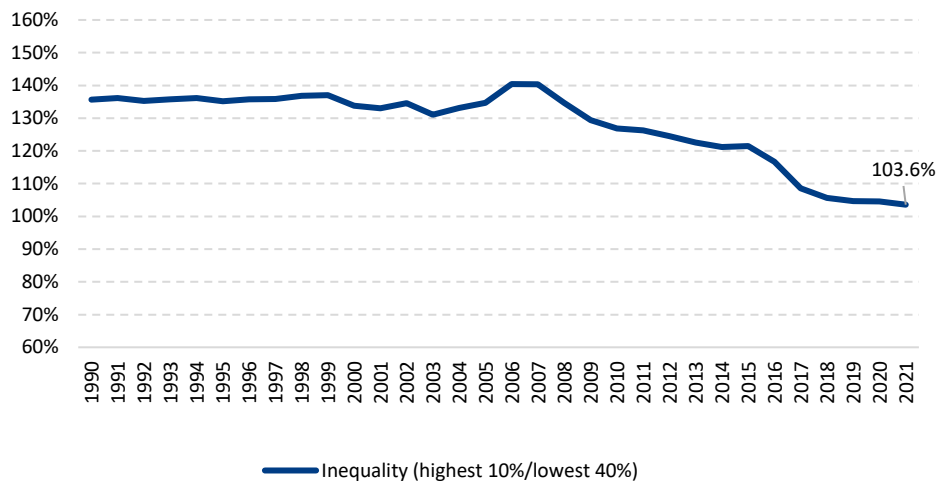
Reply to paragraph 6 (a) of the list of issues

21. In spring 2023, the Prime Minister's report on poverty in Iceland came out. The report shows that the low-income rate had reached 13.5% in 2021 according to register data. However, it is highlighted that the rate is probably overestimated, among other things on account of students, since student loans were not counted as income.

Reply to paragraph 6 (b) of the list of issues

22. Levels of inequality, before taxes and transfers defined as the ratio between the total income of the richest 10 per cent of the population and the total income of the poorest 40 per cent is shown in the figure below. The level of inequality after transfer and taxes and the ratio between assets are not available.

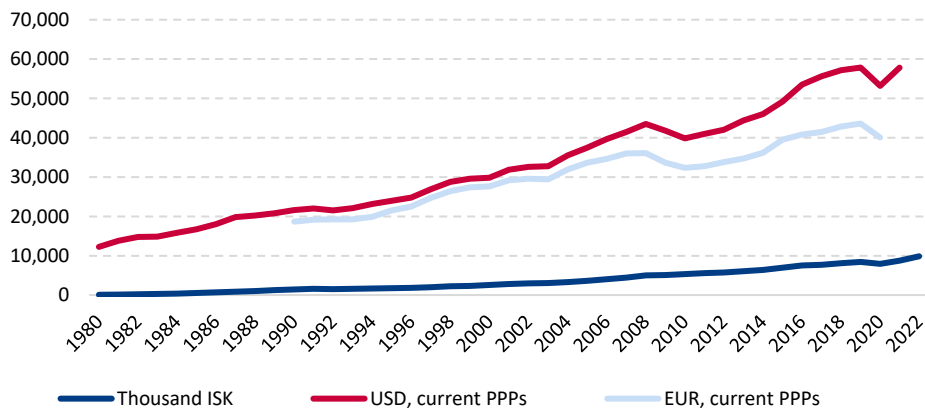
Level of income inequality before taxes and transfer

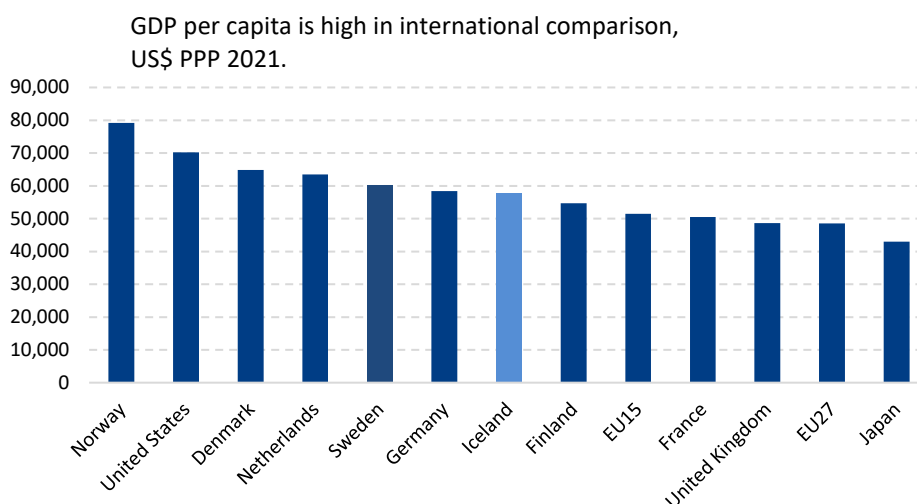


Reply to paragraph 6 (c) of the list of issues

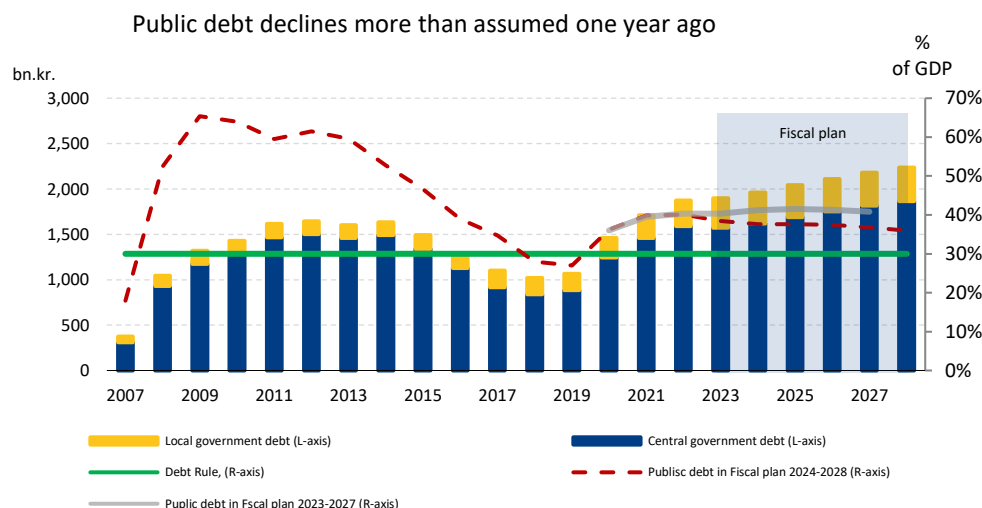
23. The economy has fully recovered after the pandemic and was the fastest growing economy in the OECD area in 2022. Unemployment is very low, around 3%, and employment is high. Still Iceland, as a small open economy, is volatile and vulnerable to shocks. The COVID pandemic hit the economy fast, with a 7.2% contraction, but it rebounded fast as the government put measures in place that received potential output (production capacity) and household purchasing power. The economy grew by 4.3% 2021, 6.4% 2022 and is expected to grow by 3.8% 2023. The main driver for growth is the rebound of the tourism sector to pre-pandemic levels.

Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita





24. The fiscal stance is slightly contractionary, and the debt ratio is 40% of GDP and is declining at a slow pace.



Reply to paragraph 6 (d) of the list of issues

	note	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Proportion of public revenue generated through taxes		73.7%	75.9%	78.7%	77.5%	75.8%
Proportion of public revenue generated through taxes and SSCs	1	81.4%	83.6%	85.8%	84.7%	82.8%
Total public revenue as % of GDP		44.8%	42.0%	42.3%	41.4%	43.5%
Proportion of public revenue obtained through direct taxes		41.7%	43.3%	45.8%	44.1%	44.4%
Proportion of public revenue obtained through indirect taxes		32.0%	32.6%	32.9%	33.4%	31.4%
Proportion of public revenue obtained through SSCs	1	7.7%	7.7%	7.1%	7.2%	7.0%
Corporate tax revenue rate		20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%
Percentage of total revenue generated from personal tax collected on the incomes of the richest 10 per cent of the population	2	27.6%	24.3%	24.1%	29.0%	27.6%
Evaluation of the amount of tax evasion and tax avoidance	3

	<i>note</i>	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Fiscal cost of the main tax benefits (million ISK)	4	13 090	14 302	14 497	14 600	15 755
Fiscal cost of the main tax benefits as % of GDP		0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.

1. SSCs = social security contributions.
2. The value indicates the percentage share of the richest 10 per cent of the population in total personal income taxes, including capital incomes and capital gains.
3. The amount of tax evasion and tax avoidance has not been evaluated for Iceland in a comprehensive and coherent manner based on established methods. Nor have any formal estimates been made publicly available in recent time. On the basis of indications from preliminary assessment of the VAT gap, the authorities assume that the scale is broadly similar as in other Nordic countries. The authorities participate actively in international initiatives aimed at combatting tax evasion and avoidance and amendments to tax legislation are made on an ongoing basis to improve compliance and eliminate opportunities in this regard.
4. The main tax benefits are the child benefits and the interest rebate.

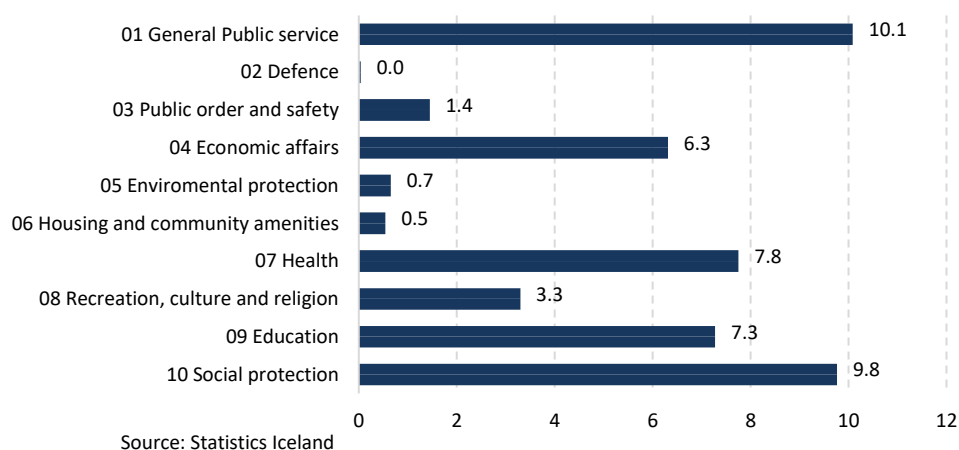
Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues

25. General Government total expenditure has averaged 47.2% of GDP over the period 1998–2022. According to the OECD classification of the function of government (COFOC) as presented by Statistics Iceland, the proportion of total expenditure allocated to social spending, including social security, food, water and sanitation, housing, health and education has averaged 54% of General Government total expenditure or roughly 25.3% of GDP over the period.

Reply to paragraph 6 (f) of the list of issues

Average General Government expenditure by function 1998-2022

Classification of the function of government (COFOC), % of GDP



26. Despite relatively successful public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the large share of tourism services relative to Iceland's GDP made the economy vulnerable to the economic consequences of global restrictions on travel. In 2019, tourism's direct contribution to GDP was 8%. Reflecting the weight of tourism in exports, Iceland's exports shrank by over 30% in 2020, more than in any other OECD country, and service exports contracted by roughly 55% in the wake of restrictive measures taken by all major trading partners. In 2020 the Icelandic economy contracted by 7.2%. Local consumers and firms transferred their expenditure during the pandemic from imported consumer durables and tourism-related services to domestic services. Iceland's imports declined by over 20%.

27. As a result, the government introduced countermeasures aimed at reducing uncertainty, maintaining demand, and preserving the productive capacity of the economy. As a result, household disposable income rose during the pandemic and unemployment rates were lower than expected and job relations during the pandemic resulted in a fast rebound of the economy after the pandemic. In total the government's countermeasures amounted to almost ISK 450 billion in the years 2020–2022 (4.5% of GDP), of which ISK 320 billion directly affected the State Treasury. The consequence of this was a negative fiscal balance of more than 8% in 2020 and 2021.

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

28. The Icelandic government carried out various measures to mitigate the economic and societal effects of COVID-19, as is further discussed in Iceland's fifth report to the Committee. Further information in English on these measures can be found on the government's web page: <https://www.government.is/government/covid-19>.

29. The government appointed two working groups to make recommendations for social and health measures because of the effect of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups. The working groups set forth various recommendations for specific measures aimed at mitigating the negative long-term effects of the pandemic on vulnerable groups. One billion ISK has been delivered for the measures which, among other things, aim to boost activity and prevent loneliness and social isolation in vulnerable groups, increase services to the long-term unemployed, support mental health and telehealth services, and increase prevention measures and services to victims of violence and violent offenders.

Reply to paragraph 8 of the list of issues

30. Iceland has a multi-faceted approach to anti-corruption that is grounded in its Constitution and relevant legislative acts that serve to promote democracy, integrity and transparency as well as safeguarding against corruption. The Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Justice are primarily responsible for developing and implementing anti-corruption policies. Iceland is a member to various international organisations and treaties in the field of anti-corruption. In addition, Iceland has a robust legal framework for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and can therefore co-operate successfully with other State Parties on any investigation regarding corruption offences.

31. The Government Employees Act No 70/1996 establishes an apolitical professional public service that is efficient and effective in serving both the government and the Icelandic people. The Act provides a legal framework for the effective and fair employment, management and leadership of public officials and employees, as well as defining and delineating their rights and obligations. Among those rights is legal protection in the case of reporting of wrongdoing, as an employee may not be adversely treated for disclosing to the appropriate parties that laws or ethical rules have been breached of which he has become aware in his work. To ensure transparency and meritocracy within the public service, all vacant posts shall be advertised in the Legal Gazette.

32. The Act on the Althing Ombudsman was amended in 2018 to include an article on the protection of those who report violations to the Ombudsman. In June 2019, amendments were made to the Administrative Procedure Act, and it now includes a chapter on the freedom of expression and the duty of confidentiality of public employees. According to the chapter, it can never be considered a breach of confidentiality to report a breach of law or other improper conduct by other public employees.

33. The Act No 40/2020 on Protection of Whistle Blowers entered into force on 1 January 2021. The Act provides for comprehensive protection for whistle blowers and applies to employees who in good faith disclose information or data on breaches of law or other wrongful conduct in their workplace, whether they are employed in the public or private sector. An employee who has made a disclosure by providing information or data, in compliance with the Act, may not be subjected to any detriment as a result. Such detrimental action may, among other things, include reducing rights, making onerous changes to job

responsibilities, cancelling a contract, terminating a contract, or being subjected to any kind of reprisal as a result.

34. The Act No 64/2020 on Conflicts of Interests in the Government Offices of Iceland provides a comprehensive framework for the prevention of conflicts of interest among persons with top executive functions. It sets out requirements for the registration of assets, permitted outside activities, conditions for contact with lobbyists as well as restrictions on employment after the termination of functions. It should also be noted that all ministers disclose and set out in a public register all gifts they receive, as per their decision.

35. In November 2018 a police detective was convicted by the Landsréttur appeals court for corruption offences, which consisted of providing classified information in exchange for personal monetary gain. There is currently one ongoing investigation concerning bribery and corruption which was detected in 2019 and involves one of Iceland's largest fishery enterprises. There have been no corruption cases detected concerning land administration, public procurement, or tax administration. Icelandic laws on public procurement, Act No 120/2016, implement the procurement directives that apply to the European Economic Area as well as the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) with the World Trade Organization. A public procurement policy for government entities from 2021 has the overall goal that procurement is carried out in a transparent manner, that staff carry out the procurement with knowledge and integrity and that public funds be used in a socially responsible manner. One of the four main goals of the policy is increased transparency in procurement. Mandatory use of eInvoices was introduced in May 2021 and governmental invoices are published on an open portal to increase transparency in procurement.

Specific ethics guidelines were issued in 2014 for all personnel engaged in procurement activities and all governmental agencies have a dedicated procurement officer responsible by law for procurement activities of the entity.

36. All procurement is advertised in the online version of the "Supplement to the Official Journal" of the EU. It is also advertised on the portal "utbodsvefur.is", where there is a special information section about bribery laws in Iceland and penalties, as well as a link to the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials. An independent committee, the Procurement Complaints Committee, handles complaints by companies for alleged violations of the Public Procurement Act, with members independently appointed by the Supreme Court.

37. Regarding tax measures for combating foreign bribery, Iceland expressly prohibits the deductibility of bribe payments for tax purposes under Article 50(6) of the Act on Income Tax No 90/2003. Article 50(2) of the Income Tax Act provides that costs in any form from acquiring illegal confiscated profits or profits linked to punishable offenses cannot be deducted from taxable income, including any bribes paid to state-owned enterprises officials.

38. Tax officials at the Iceland Revenue and Customs have access to the new and updated OECD Bribery and Corruption Awareness Handbook for Tax Examiners and Tax Auditors. They also attend courses on corruption and foreign bribery risks. The Nordic countries are collaborating in preparing training material on detecting corruption and bribery and upon completion the material will be used to provide awareness-raising and training for tax officials.

Reply to paragraph 9 (a) of the list of issues

39. Icelandic gender equality law provides comprehensive anti-discrimination protection. As regards the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights irrespective of Gender and the Act on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market reference is made to paragraphs 14 to 16 in Iceland's fifth periodic report. In the summer of 2022, the Act No 85/2018 on Equal Treatment Irrespective of Race and Ethnic Origin was amended and expanded. The legislation is now referred to as the Act on Equal Treatment Outside the Labour Market and aims to guarantee equal treatment of individuals irrespective of race, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual characteristics or gender expression in all areas of society, outside the labour market.

Reply to paragraph 9 (b) of the list of issues

40. The Act on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market and the Act on Equal Treatment Outside the Labour Market guarantee protection for persons with disabilities and immigrants, including with respect to the right to education, access to housing and rights in the labour market. The Act specifically addresses multiple discrimination. Denial of reasonable accommodation amounts to discrimination within the meaning of the Act. The Act also includes a specific provision on reasonable accommodation, which provides that the appropriate steps shall be taken to enable persons with disabilities to enjoy equal opportunities in the labour market in particular and in society in general.

Reply to paragraph 9 (c) of the list of issues

41. It is established practice to integrate international human rights treaties in Icelandic legislation before they are ratified. The United Nations human rights treaties have had widespread effects on the Icelandic Constitution and primary legislation. The Act on Equal Treatment Outside the Labour Market No 85/2018 and Act on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market No 86/2018 are examples of the impact made by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016 various amendments have been made to Icelandic legislation in order to integrate the convention into the Icelandic legal order and implementation. For example, the Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities with Long-term Support Needs No 38/2018 was adopted in 2018. Work is also ongoing with respect to the preparation of the national plan of action to advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to further guarantee that the rights provided for in the convention are effectively enshrined in law and implemented.

Reply to paragraph 9 (d) of the list of issues

42. There is a special human rights governmental webpage covering the human rights conventions that Iceland is party to, including the CEDAW and CRPD conventions.

43. In the autumn of 2022, a project management team was appointed, tasked with preparing a national plan of action to advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is composed of representatives from various line ministries, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities and interest groups representing persons with disabilities. A convention for consultation was held in February 2023 and attended by little less than 700 people. Nearly 50 proposals were prioritised and returned to the ministry. In the middle of 2023, the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, together with representatives from interest groups, convened ten meetings in order to promote the aforementioned national plan of action and allow more perspectives. Nearly 500 people attended the meetings.

44. The parliamentary resolution is scheduled to be introduced into the parliament, Althingi, in the autumn of 2023. The national plan of action proposes that in the first year the main focus will be on awareness-raising and education, as most action is based on informing professionals and the public about the situation of persons with disabilities and their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Short TV programs promoting the convention are in the process of being finalised.

Reply to paragraph 10 (a) of the list of issues

45. Since the first Gender Equality Act was adopted in 1976, Icelandic schools have been obliged to educate students about gender equality and to prepare both boys and girls for equal participation in family and work life. Under Article 15 of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender No 150/2020, students must receive appropriate equality and gender education including education on gender stereotypes, gender-based study and career

choices and issues of disabled and LGBTI+ people. The Directorate of Education recently compiled a detailed list for teachers of educational material on sexual violence. It includes educational material in a variety of formats, such as books, short films, booklets and websites.

46. The #kvennastarf campaign is a Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

47. Response to the common myth that it is natural to classify professions into women's work and men's work. The campaign poses the question: which jobs are women's work? The answer is that sex or gender should not be a determining factor in choosing a course of study or profession. The campaign is a collaboration between the industry association, the Technical College, and more. They maintain a website where one can see all kinds of gender statistics when it comes to women's jobs and apprenticeships.

Reply to paragraph 10 (b) of the list of issues

48. On 1 February 2023 women made up 25% of higher-educated active police officers at that time. Looking only at those holding the position of police officer women make up 34% of active police officers.

49. All complaints concerning sexual or gender-based harassment are submitted to a professional board established under the National Commissioner of the Police, or, where an offence has been committed, to the District Prosecutor. The professional board established under the National Commissioner of the Police was created in 2014 during which year one notification was made by a female staff member regarding sexual and/or gender-based harassment. No complaints were made during 2015–2016 but in 2017 two complaints were received from different police authorities. In 2018, no notifications were received, and in 2019 one notification concerning sexual and/or gender-based harassment was received from a female member of staff. Three notifications were submitted to the professional board, one by a female member of staff, one by a male, and one by a police authority. No notifications were made in 2021 and 2022. So far in 2023, one notification has been made by a female member of staff.

50. Various efforts have been made in recent years, among other things to counter and/or reduce the likelihood of violence and harassment within the police. Each police authority is responsible for its staff and Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

51. Response to reported incidents. Efforts have also been made to measure work culture holistically, including sexual or gender-based harassment, not only among police officers but among all police personnel.

52. The police have worked closely with experts to counter gender-based discrimination and especially bullying and harassment in the workplace. This has included, among other things, ensuring that the entrance exam to the police special task force is not structured in a way that makes it only possible for men to pass the exam.

53. The National Police Commissioner has entered into an agreement with The National Queer Organisation of Iceland in order to increase equality within the police, promote education and make the workplace LGBTI+ friendly.

Reply to paragraph 10 (c) of the list of issues

54. In the autumn of 2023, a total of 555 companies and institutions had implemented the equal pay standard and received equal pay certification. The people employed by these companies and institutions represent around 79% of the employees the equal pay certification provision of the gender equality act was originally estimated to reach, or around 116.000 employees. Additionally, a total of 73 companies and institutions have implemented received equal pay confirmation.

55. The Directorate of Equality carries out regular supervision of the implementation of the equal pay system and sends notifications to the parties involved to remind them of their legal obligations, if necessary. The Directorate is authorised to impose per diem fines in cases

where companies do not demonstrate the will to implement the equal pay standard. So far, no sanctions have been imposed on companies or organisations with respect to equal pay certification. In a few cases, the Directorate has indicated to a company that sanctions will be imposed if they do not comply, which has proved effective in all cases.

III. Issues regarding the general provisions of the Covenant (Articles 6 to 15)

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

56. Overall labour market participation in Iceland is 82%. In August 2023, there were 52,424 immigrants in the labour market which is 23% of the overall labour market participation. There has been a fast growth in immigrant participation and there has been an increase of 17,300 since August 2017 while workers with Icelandic nationality have increased by 3,200 during the same period. The overall unemployment rate in September 2023 was 3.0% for both men and women. 51% of the unemployed are of a foreign nationality and around 1% are young adults, aged 18–24 years.

57. A comprehensive policy making is in process within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour regarding migration and refugee issues, which among others focuses on how to increase the migration labour force in the country, and overcome the increase in immigrants' unemployment, and language instruction accessibility. The policy is expected to be finished in 2024.

Reply to paragraph 12 of the list of issues

58. The Action Plan for Child Protection 2019–2022 was broad and included actions regarding cooperation and early intervention. One of the products of the action plan was the Prosperity Act, which is an act on the integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity. The principal aim of the Act is for children and parents to have access to appropriate integrated services without facing barriers. Although the Act does not specifically address the right to work without conflict between employment and family responsibilities, it does put certain obligations on service providers to monitor and respond as soon as necessary to children's and parents' needs for services. There is other legislation that more directly deals with the matter of workers' rights and support to families, including parental leave and childcare, such as the labour market legislation and the Act on Social Services of Municipalities.

59. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health has recently developed educational material and tools with the aim of supporting workplaces in preventing sexual harassment. There has also been an advertising campaign to draw attention to the subject.

Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

60. Priority clauses have a long history in the Icelandic labour market and came into being in free collective bargaining between workers and employers. The government's view is that intervention by means of legislation or other measures with the intention of prohibiting the priority clauses in free collective agreements could have an effect on the stability of the Icelandic labour market.

Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues

61. Everyone who has been a legal resident in Iceland for a certain period automatically becomes a member of the Icelandic Social Insurance System, unless provisions in international agreements provide otherwise, according to Article 4 of The Social Security Act No 100/2007. Certain additional conditions must be fulfilled to have a right to old-age

pension payments, e.g., regarding age and length of residence. Income and family circumstances can also have an impact.

62. Persons between the ages of 18 and 67 years can apply to the Social Insurance Administration for disability assessment, where capability is assessed after illness, accident, or disability. It is a condition that rehabilitation has been exhausted or that a doctor confirms that rehabilitation does not apply. Individuals' entitlement is based on their residence in Iceland from 16–67 years of age. The person must have lived in Iceland for at least the three years preceding application. Full payment is based on 40 years of residence in Iceland.

Reply to paragraph 14 (a) of the list of issues

63. The amount of benefits for persons with disabilities is, in general, higher than unemployment benefits. Age and living situation can impact the amount of benefits. The total amount of disability benefits is based on several categories of benefits. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is currently working on amendments to The Social Security Act No 100/2007 in order to simplify the benefit system and make it more transparent, i.e., with regard to the amount of disability benefits people may be entitled to receive from the state. Full disability benefits for a person living alone, who qualified for disability benefits rather young, i.e., at the age of 20, are ISK 438,428 per month. The lowest amount of disability benefits, for a person living with other(s) who qualified for disability benefits at 66 years of age is ISK 327,657 per month. The amount of unemployment benefits for a person with the right to 100% benefits is ISK 331,298 per month.

Reply to paragraph 14 (b) of the list of issues

64. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is currently working on a proposal for a new Act on the disability pension system as well as amendments to The Social Security Act No 100/2007 in order to simplify the benefits system and make it more transparent, i.e., with regard to the amount of disability benefits people may be entitled to receive from the State. The main targets for the new system are:

(a) To improve the living conditions and quality of life of people with reduced working capacity. Particular attention will be on improving their situation and opportunities for activity, education and employment on their own terms;

(b) To increasingly provide people who lose their ability to work with services and assistance promptly with regard to the physical, psychological and social factors that affect their ability to work;

(c) To direct efforts at increasing the number of flexible and part-time jobs in a collaboration of the State, municipalities and the business community.

Reply to paragraph 14 (c) of the list of issues

65. Pension rights are based on residency in Iceland for a certain amount of time, *cf.* paragraph 61. People who have worked in two or more EU/EEA countries may have accumulated pension rights in each of them. Residents from a EU/EEA country, must have resided in Iceland for at least one year (between the ages of 16 and 67). Non-EU/EEA members must have resided in Iceland for three years (between the ages of 16 and 67). Pension payments generally stop when moving to non-EU/EEA countries, with the exception of the USA and Canada.

Reply to paragraph 15 of the list of issues

66. The Child Protection Act does not have any specific provisions regarding bridging the gap between paternal leave and guaranteed childcare. The aim of the Act is to ensure that children who live in unacceptable conditions, children who have been subjected to violence or other degrading treatment, or children who seriously endanger their own health and

development receive the necessary assistance. There is other legislation that more directly deals with the matter of workers' rights and support to families, such as laws on parental leave, day-care in private homes and pre-schools.

67. A working group on strengthening the preschool level submitted a final report in May 2019, which included multifaceted proposals on how to strengthen schoolwork at the preschool level, including how to bridge the gap between parental leave and childcare. The Ministry of Education and Children has been working on some of the recommendations, including changes to the National Curriculum Guide. In the autumn of 2023, the Minister of Education and Children will establish a conversation with stakeholders on the necessary changes needed to guarantee better preschools. Discussions will include what changes are needed in Icelandic society for the youngest citizens to get the best childhood that can be guaranteed at any time.

Reply to paragraph 16 of the list of issues

68. In January 2023, the child protection committees in each municipality were replaced by child protection services and district councils. There is a total of four councils and each child protection service must be a member of a council. District Councils are independent in their work and make the following decisions by decree:

- (a) Use of resources without parental consent;
- (b) Keeping a child outside the home for up to four months;
- (c) Authorisation for child protection services to make a claim in court for the placement of a child for up to twelve months;
- (d) Authorisation for child protection services to file a claim in court for deprivation of custody;
- (e) Visitation in foster care and placement.

69. In the policy on a child-friendly Iceland (see e.g., paragraph 65 in Iceland's fifth report) there is a specific action on education and training of professionals, public servants and others who work with and for children. The educational material will be accessible to everyone and processed by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. Furthermore, an educational plan will be presented with the aim of increasing the knowledge of employees and professionals about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

70. From 2022, the University of Iceland has been offering a diploma in Integrated Services for Children. The course provides basic knowledge of legislation that concerns services to children with a special focus on the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The social work department at the University of Iceland also has a diploma program on child protection, as well as courses on the rights of the child.

71. In 2021, amendments were made to the Children's Act to strengthen children's right to participation, including in custody cases.

72. The municipalities are responsible for child protection services on a municipality level for children and their families. On State level, the National Agency for Children and Families oversees the implementation of the child protection legislation and supports municipalities by providing child protection interventions such as treatment homes, multi-systemic therapy, fostering, and other out-of-home care. The National Agency for Children and Families has funding of up to 2 billion ISK for the year 2023.

Reply to paragraph 17 of the list of issues

73. There are no studies to date that have shown why women with a foreign background are more likely to experience domestic violence. It is clear, however, that they are in a vulnerable position, among other things due to lack of contact in Iceland. The Institute of Education has been granted funds for researching gender-based violence against women with

a foreign background. The results will be submitted to professionals and policy-makers within this policy area, with the aim to improve services and support resources for women with a foreign background. The Women Of Multicultural Ethnicity Network in Iceland has been granted funds for the project *You are worth it!*, which has the objective of countering violence against women with a foreign background and is based on awareness-raising and increasing access to information, services, support and empowerment among equals.

74. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has supported outreach to migrant women in different shelters for survivors of domestic violence. All of the shelters now provide information in several different languages about their service (see e.g. paragraphs 47–51 in Iceland’s 9th report to the CEDAW Committee). Furthermore, the ministry supported the National Police Commissioner in strengthening local cooperation around the country in the support of survivors of domestic violence and working on preventive measures. This includes cooperation between the police, social services, child protection, health services, and the education system.

75. The implementation strategy for immigration issues 2022–2025 includes action to make victims and perpetrators of violence with a foreign background familiar with the available services and resources. It also anticipates that service and emergency personnel will receive training in immigration issues, cultural sensitivity, and multiculturalism. The project is expected to be ongoing and address the most urgent issues at any given time.

Reply to paragraph 18 of the list of issues

76. The General Penal Code’s human trafficking provision (Article 227a) was amended in 2021 to increase judicial protection for victims of human trafficking, especially women and children with a foreign background, and to make it easier to prosecute perpetrators for human trafficking. The amendments added further known manifestations of human trafficking to the provision, including prostitution, forced marriage, and forced labour, e.g., housework. The terms “servitude” and “slavery or enslavement” have also been added to the legal definition in line with Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol.

77. Amendments were also made to the definition of methods of perpetration with respect to human trafficking. On the one hand, references to individual provisions of the General Penal Code were abandoned, as this was considered too restrictive, and on the other hand, new methods of perpetration were added to the legal definition, such as through violence and abduction. The method of perpetration now involves taking advantage of the human trafficking victim’s difficult situation, the person’s ignorance, or vulnerability, or taking advantage of a position of superiority. It is expected that more human trafficking cases will be investigated by the police and accepted by the justice administration system after the entry into force of the amendments.

78. In 2019, the third National Action Plan on combating trafficking in human beings and other forms of exploitation was presented (NAP). The NAP is based on four main focuses or categories, the so-called “four Ps“, which are modelled on international actions against human trafficking: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Partnership.

79. A steering group on human trafficking, with representatives from public agencies, NGOs and private companies, was appointed to implement the NAP. The group meets regularly and has received guidance from OSCE to perform its role as effectively as possible. The steering group has formed three task forces, in the field of prevention, protection, and investigation and prosecution.

80. The implementation of the NAP has proceeded well and most of the actions have been fully implemented, including a project establishing a co-ordination centre for victims of human trafficking. In 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs made a service agreement with Bjarkarhlíð Family Justice Centre for it to co-ordinate the provision of assistance to victims and presumed victims of THB on a trial basis until June 2024. Whenever there is a possible victim of THB, the case is referred to Bjarkarhlíð and an operational team is convened to discuss the case. Victims do not attend the meeting. The team provides emergency assistance

immediately and calls other professionals to organise the provision of further assistance. The team has a contact person within the police, who has experience in THB cases.

81. In March 2020, the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police issued revised and improved information and instructions on procedures for the police to recognise possible victims of human trafficking. The Centre for Police Training and Professional Development received a grant from the government to enhance and increase education for police officers and public prosecutors about organised crime, including human trafficking.

82. In 2018, police departments around the country received increased financial resources to add full-time positions for detectives to boost investigations of prostitution and human trafficking. Most cases of human trafficking for sexual purposes have arisen in the jurisdictions of the chiefs of the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police and the Police of the North-Eastern Region, and the added financing has been put to good use in both jurisdictions. Additionally, since 2018, the chief of the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police has taken the initiative to carry out regular investigations of the purchase of the services of prostitutes.

83. The Directorate of Immigration has created a thorough work process for members of staff to identify possible victims of human trafficking when processing applications for residence permits or international protection. The Directorate for Labour has created newly updated work processes for the identification of victims of human trafficking. In addition, individual projects designed to combat all forms of violence, and support both victims and perpetrators of violence, receive public funding. Examples include the National Emergency Number 112 electronic portal on violence, where individuals can access information and resources as regards human trafficking and violence, including sexual violence.

Reply to paragraph 19 of the list of issues

84. In March 2023, a new action programme for the handling of sexual offences applicable for the period 2023–2025 came into effect. The action programme replaces the previous plan applicable during 2018–2022. The action programme includes a five-point plan divided into 18 steps. The first point relates to case processing time where the aim includes increasing the quality of investigations, harmonising investigation procedures nationally, and shortening procedures without compromising case quality.

85. During preparation of the action programme a special allocation was made in order to strengthen the investigation and prosecution process for sexual offences. Last year the Minister of Justice allocated funds for recruiting for seven new positions with the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police: A specialist in the biotechnology section of the forensics department, a specialist in the computer investigation department, in addition to recruitment for new positions in the prosecution section and three positions in the sexual offences department. The relevant recruits took up their respective posts in the autumn of 2022. Thus, an increased number of staff and changes in working methods has led to some success in reducing the police caseload backlog. Active sexual offence cases in the prosecution section and sexual offences department have decreased by 37% in the year since the police authority was granted the funds. Reflecting this trend, the police authority had 396 active cases on 1 September 2022. However, on 1 September 2023 the number had been brought down to 248, representing a decrease of 148 cases. At the same time, the police authority had received a number of new cases, therefore concluding 339 cases in total during those 12 months. Several other measures have been taken to speed the processing of sexual offences. The police authority's procedures were reviewed for the purpose of expediting case progression when investigating offences. Cooperation between the sexual offences department and computer investigation department was also increased and improved in order to shorten the investigation time for electronic data in relation to sexual offences. Support services from the service department of the police authority were also increased. Additionally, a dashboard was set up in order to provide an overview of the number of cases and their progression in the sexual offences department and prosecution section.

86. The European Court of Human Rights has not delivered its judgment in the case brought by several women against the Icelandic State due to the handling of sexual offences.

Reply to paragraph 20 of the list of issues

87. Plans have been made to introduce a housing policy for the next 15 years into the parliament, Althingi, during autumn 2023, along with a five-year action programme. As a part of that policy making process, a green paper on housing (assessment of the situation in the policy area) and white paper on housing (draft housing policy) have been issued and consultations undertaken with the general public and stakeholders in the housing market. The housing policy rests on a vision of stability in the housing market where a diverse supply of housing meets need, in balance with the environment. Everyone should have access to safe and good housing and their housing costs kept manageable.

88. The housing policy contains several actions, aimed at fulfilling the following four policy objectives:

(a) Increased equilibrium in the housing market where a diverse supply of housing meets need and the development of housing and rental price is stable;

(b) Effective administrative organisation and improved working environment for civil-engineering activity promotes increased quality, safety, traceability and efficiency of housing development, in balance with the environment;

(c) Housing security should be guaranteed for the whole country by creating the conditions for everyone to have access to secure and safe housing at affordable costs, providing housing support for those who are at a disadvantage in the housing market;

(d) Housing supply should contribute to an active labour market and support robust employment areas throughout the country.

89. The housing policy and its corresponding action programme are founded on an agreement between the State and the municipalities about the development of housing during the next ten years and implementation of housing plans in the municipalities in order to follow up these plans. In this way, a foundation was laid for a common housing vision and policy at State and municipal level in order to guarantee the necessary development in the housing market. The agreement entails the preparation of a complete housing plan for the whole country in order to assess and meet the housing needs of different groups in society. Development should go hand in hand with need, making sure that land suitable for building is available in order to guarantee the development of at least 35,000 dwellings within ten years, with 20,000 thereof developed in the first five years. Out of the total number of new dwellings, 30% are to be delivered at affordable prices, built with the support of government housing funding, and, in addition, 5% of new dwellings will be social housing provided by municipalities.

90. In addition to the aforementioned measures, several measures are also set forth in the housing policy specifically for the purpose of improving the housing security for those in a vulnerable position in the housing market. This includes reviewing the Rental Act in order to improve the legal status and housing security of tenants; reviewing housing support for tenants in order to better support those in need; analysing the need for social housing in the municipalities and how this need is to be met; analysing the housing needs of the homeless and preparation of a plan to meet this need in terms of the "Housing First" ideology; looking into a specific effort to develop general housing in the municipalities in the capital area, which for the time being would be delivered to asylum seekers in return for specific government funding; and improving the provision of information and services regarding housing support for individuals.

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues

91. In the Health Policy until the year 2030, there is a chapter on human resources and the importance of ensuring that health services will be staffed by well-educated, competent, and motivated workers.

92. The National Council of Staffing and Education in Health Services was established by the Minister of Health in May 2021 as a consultation forum to provide advice on matters

regarding health workforce education and employment priorities, including cross-government and other stakeholder involvement. Among the key aims of the Council is the improvement of connections between the education and training of health professionals on the one hand, and the identified priorities of employment and skills required on the other hand.

93. The Ministry of Health is at present conducting a comprehensive staffing analysis across the health system for the purpose of mapping the need for personnel at present and for the future. This approach is designed to formulate a vision for the future regarding data and analyses that the Ministry of Health needs to have at its disposal to gain an overview of the need for staff in the healthcare sector. In addition, efforts are made regarding parameters that can affect staffing in the healthcare sector in general, such as the working environment, renewal of appliances, innovation, technological advances and increasing telehealth services, in addition to other factors regarding the education of healthcare workers.

94. There has also been significant progress in strengthening collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Children and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. The ministries are working together to find ways to increase the number of students in healthcare sciences, for example by reinforcing learning in simulation centres.

95. The aim is that all these factors will result in increasing the number of healthcare workers. Considerable funding has also been provided to Landspítali – The National University Hospital and the Akureyri Hospital in order to improve staffing and working facilities.

Reply to paragraph 22 of the list of issues

96. Iceland is currently working towards the ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention (No 190). No decision has been made regarding the ratification of the Domestic Workers Convention (No 189).

Reply to paragraph 23 of the list of issues

97. The Directorate of Education oversees the external evaluation of pre-primary, compulsory, and upper-secondary schools on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Children. The evaluation process involves examining available data on a school's functions and initiatives, conducting site visits, and interviewing students, staff, and parents. It is important to note that the annual number of evaluated schools and the methods of selecting them for evaluation vary across different school levels. As it stands, six pre-primary schools, ten compulsory schools, and five secondary schools are assessed each year. A revision of this evaluation is currently under consideration.

98. The follow-up actions post-evaluation are coordinated by the Directorate of Education. Should an evaluation highlight areas needing improvement – for instance, the creation of a welcoming plan for children who are non-Icelandic native speakers – the implicated municipality (in cases involving pre-primary and compulsory schools) and the school itself are tasked with submitting a detailed improvement strategy to the Directorate of Education. This strategy must outline both the intended Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

99. Response to the evaluation findings and the approach to monitoring progress.

100. The cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Directorate has deepened in the realm of welcoming programs and educating newly arrived students and those with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Specialists from both institutions have formed a team dedicated to providing municipalities and schools with lectures and guidance to better address these students' educational and psycho-social needs.

101. Dropout in upper secondary education has been decreasing since the year 2003 (see paragraph 112 in Iceland's fifth report). Almost 62% of new entrants in 2016 had graduated

in 2020, while just over 18% were still in education without having graduated. Just over 46% of immigrants who entered the upper secondary level for the first time in the autumn of 2016 had graduated in 2020. That is the lowest dropout rate for immigrants since Statistics Iceland started publishing these data in 1995. However, the rate is considerably higher than among new entrants with no foreign background, which is around 18%.

102. Pre-schools are not compulsory in Iceland but almost all children are registered in pre-schools. Officially all children are in compulsory schools, age 6–16, in Iceland. However, a small number of pupils have temporarily not attended compulsory school due to school refusal. If absences affect a student's learning and success, it calls for a Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

103. Response from the school. The school should act if the student's total absences exceed a tenth of the school year. Local authorities must according to the curriculum guide establish criteria for formal Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

104. Responses to declining school attendance by students, which stipulate measures that are progressively aggravated along with declining school attendance until absences from school reach the level of seriousness to be reported to the child protection authorities.

105. Various actions have been taken, with an emphasis on culturally and linguistically diverse children. The Education Policy up to 2030 pays particular attention to students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. The first action plan, covering the years from 2021–24, envisages an increase in the publication of diverse study material for students with Icelandic as a second language and increased access to specialised pedagogical support, notably expert advice, at all school levels throughout the country and for all age groups. Such measures are accompanied by actions promoting teacher training. The government also plans to develop standardised tests to monitor students' progress in Icelandic and other foreign languages.

106. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools has been revised, placing greater emphasis on Icelandic as a second language and multilingualism. New chapters on multicultural competencies, welcoming newly arrived students to schools, and bilingualism have been also introduced, offering a stronger framework for municipalities, schools, and teachers.

Reply to paragraph 24 of the list of issues

107. In January 2020, a new and revised Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools came into force. The Act holds a competency framework that entails criteria for teachers and school leaders and provides guidance on the content of teacher education and professional development and continuous education, among other things. The competence shall be guided professionally by consideration for students' well-being and education, and to treat them in a respectful and professional manner grounded in democracy and equality. An extensive regulation was put into force in 2022 on a competency framework containing criteria for the general and specific competency of teachers and school leaders at preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. Inclusive education and equality at all school levels is one of the key scopes of the regulation.

108. All students in compulsory and upper secondary schools have, based on the School Acts, the right to a good learning environment without bullying. Schools are e.g., obliged to have an action plan against bullying with an active Replies to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the list of issues.

109. Response plan to deal with bullying issues at school. A professional council at the Directorate of Education provides support to the school community regarding bullying issues with general advice, guidance, and information. Bullying cases can be referred to the council if it is not possible to find a satisfactory solution within a school or municipality, or due to the alleged inaction of the same parties. Furthermore, one of the main actions of the Education Policy up to 2030 is the development of comprehensive school services for all school levels throughout the country based on tiered support. The emphasis will be on

social-emotional learning, prevention, early support, and data-based decision-making to support children's schooling.

Reply to paragraph 25 of the list of issues

110. Since the Icelandic Cultural Policy was published in 2013 it has functioned as a guide for municipalities and institutions in matters of art and other cultural activities. Children's and youth culture is one of the main focuses of the policy, and therefore a special action plan was drawn up for projects in that area in 2014. As a result, a thriving children's culture has left its mark on Icelandic cultural life and in many parts of the country.

111. A working group of cultural stakeholders and policymakers was assigned to create an action plan based on the cultural policy. An action plan up to 2030 was published in 2021. It consists of five objectives, the first one is about access and participation. The objective is to promote equal access to art and culture throughout the country, diverse options for professionals in the arts, more opportunities for people to participate in cultural activities, and an increased supply of events.

112. The action plan puts emphasis on reflecting the diversity of those who live in Iceland in the field of culture and art and guaranteeing them a place at the forefront of Icelandic cultural life. Obstacles that foreign artists in this country may encounter when working and communicating artistic creations will be removed. Access to art and culture is to be increased in order to combat cultural discrimination. Cultural institutions and others who receive public support for artistic and cultural activities will be encouraged to plan their activities with regard to all groups of society so that everyone has easy access regardless of social background and economy. Promotional activities of artistic life and cultural institutions are aimed at all social groups and different methods will be used to communicate information to young people, older people, disabled people, people with a foreign background, and other groups.

113. Children and young people have priority as participants and consumers in Icelandic cultural life. In many parts of the country, intensive children's activities are carried out in various fields of culture and art. Art and culture are communicated to all children in the early stages of education so that they have the opportunity to experience art and culture.

114. Art for All is a cultural project for children and youth under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs. Its objectives are to:

(a) Provide children and youth with access to the highest quality cultural events regardless of residential and economic situation, as well as strengthen children's and young people's awareness of the cultural heritage;

(b) To increase the availability and encourage artists to create quality and diverse art events that appeal to children and youth with diverse backgrounds and interests, and

(c) To increase diversity in schooling, strengthening art education in schools and strengthening the connection between compulsory schools and art life in the country.

Reply to paragraph 26 of the list of issues

115. The execution of the policy for science and technology, set for 2020 to 2022, was strongly affected by COVID-19. Public contributions to competitive funds increased in 2020–2022, following the policy's action plan and the government's pandemic-related action plan for 2020 and 2021. A new funding model for the universities was presented in the period, which focuses on quality and efficiency. For the first time, there is a focus on research activity, where the universities are rewarded for top-quality publications, international cooperation, and open-access publications. Changes have been implemented to the Act on Foreign Nationals Right to Work, making it easier for students and specialists outside the EEA to get work and residence permits for their families after graduation. An emphasis has also been placed on facilitating remote work to make it easier for people to settle down anywhere in the country. There is a growing emphasis on and understanding of the importance of using

public data in universities and research institutions in the service of new research and innovation. Further, there is a growing understanding of the importance of using public data in universities and research institutions to provide new research and innovation.

116. The number of doctoral graduates from Icelandic universities has increased, generating vital research and personnel for innovation. This was shown clearly in the Research Fund's 2022 impact assessment, which included interviews with innovation companies. The evaluation further stated that training scientists in Iceland is critical in preparing for growth in innovation-related fields. Innovation firms have increased, and greater emphasis has been placed on innovation in larger companies. The economic benefits of harnessing knowledge are abundantly clear, and such harnessing has become one of the pillars of the Icelandic economy.

117. Amendments to the Act on the Science and Technology Council took effect in April 2023. The Changes were initiated by significant changes in science, technological advancement, and innovation in the past twenty years. The main modifications lie in introducing a new legally mandated Ministerial Committee on Science and Innovation. This entails a prioritisation of the current government in the policy field of science, innovation, and technology development. The primary role of the new council is to advise the Ministerial Committee on policy formulation, particularly towards societal challenges.
