



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
21 March 2022

Original: English
English, French and Spanish only

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Ninetieth session

3–27 May 2022

Consideration of reports of States parties

Replies of Iceland to the list of issues in relation to its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports*, **

[Date received: 11 March 2022]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annexes to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Part one

Replies to the questions raised in the list of issues in relation to the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Iceland (CRC/C/ISL/Q/5-6)

Reply to paragraph 1 (a) of the list of issues

1. The parliamentary resolution Child-Friendly Iceland – Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by Althingi in June 2021. It provides for a scheduled and financed action plan on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for 2021–2024. It includes diverse actions, e.g. ones that aim to increase child participation, enhance data collection on the status of children in Iceland and increase education on children’s rights at all school levels and in society in general. The plan was prepared in wide-ranging consultation with children and in collaboration with the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, with 785 children from all over the country participating. See Annex II for a translation of the policy and action plan.

2. One of the actions in the Child-Friendly Iceland entails forming a comprehensive policy on matters concerning children and young people for the whole country. The policy is to be submitted in 2023. Additionally, a new comprehensive Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children’s Prosperity was adopted in June 2021. It includes several actions regarding policy making, including special consultation forums, both at State and municipal level. According to the Act, the Minister of Education and Children is responsible for submitting a policy on children’s prosperity and a successive 4-year action plan.

Reply to paragraph 1 (b) of the list of issues

3. The Government Agency for Child Protection was an independent entity under the administration of the Minister. As of 1 January 2022, the Government Agency for Child Protection ceased to exist in its current form and two new institutions will replace it: the National Agency for Children and Families and the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Integrated Services. Both of these entities will be government entities under the administration and supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education and Children.

4. The roles and mandates of both entities are covered by two legal acts that entered into force on 1 January 2022. Under the Act on the National Agency for Children and Families, No. 87/2021, its main function will be providing and supporting services benefiting children and promoting high quality development in line with the best available knowledge and experience at any given time. The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Integrated Services will operate under Act No 88/2021 and will monitor the quality of services provided, in accordance with specific laws. The aim of the Authority’s activities is for the services it supervises to be solid and safe and in compliance with the provisions of laws, regulations, rules, agreements and instructions.

Reply to paragraph 1 (c) of the list of issues

5. The government’s responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have aimed to ensure that the country’s necessary infrastructure is able to handle the strain created by the pandemic, as well as to minimise the effects of quarantine measures on the community. The rights of children to good health, safety, education and freedom during these times have been prioritised.

6. The government sought to ensure that COVID-19 would cause no major failures to provide services, and thus managed to ensure children’s uninterrupted access to services. Health care institutions took special measures to care for children, e.g. by increasing the availability of distance interviews. Additionally, information for children was distributed to them in a clear and simple manner, i.a. by publishing instructions for parents and children in diverse languages on the Covid.is information website and by participating in media programming for children.

7. There is an emphasis on monitoring the health and well-being of children during the pandemic and after it is over. To that effect, the Minister of Health set up two steering groups to monitor the indirect effects of COVID-19 on, respectively, public health and the nation's mental health. The first report of the mental health monitoring group specifically covered the mental health of children and young people and set out proposals for specific care for those vulnerable groups. Most of those proposals were implemented.

8. In 2020, an additional contribution of 540 m. ISK was allocated to mental health services connected to COVID-19, with a specific emphasis on children and young people and the general reinforcement of primary mental health care services. Continued financing was assured for these programmes in 2021. An additional contribution of 600 m. ISK was allocated to mental health care and social services for children and young people to meet the increased need due to COVID-19. A children's mental health care team that services the whole country was set up, mental health care services in upper secondary schools and universities were enhanced, and support was given to various programmes that support children's mental health and shorten the wait for mental health care services. Support has also been given to municipalities and civil society organisations to enhance services for children and other groups with serious mental health problems.

9. In the autumn of 2021, considerable financial resources were allocated to enhance mental health care services for children and young people, to meet the increased need for such services. Various campaigns received financial support, including ones aiming to shorten the waiting lists at the National University Hospital's Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department, the Akureyri Hospital's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Team and the Centre for Child Development and Behaviour.

10. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, notifications of domestic violence to the police and child protection committees increased. At the beginning of the summer of 2020, systematic action was taken to reduce the risk of violence and raise awareness of it, especially domestic violence and violence against children. An action team was entrusted with leading and coordinating the elaboration of these actions in a wide-ranging consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The team was also entrusted with pursuing other general actions pertaining to education, services and support relating to violence, in keeping with proposals in the plan of action against violence and its consequences for 2019–2022 (see also the response to question 5(a) and (b)). The team's actions that specifically concern children were: (a) enhancing the activities of the Children's House; (b) supporting vulnerable children to decrease their likelihood of committing violent offences; (c) enhancing cooperation between systems in relation to the processing of family matters and children's issues; and (d) increasing access to digital information about parenting skills at the heilsuvera.is website. Additionally, the national emergency hotline was developed and enhanced and the 112.is website has become an electronic portal where people can seek help concerning domestic violence and violence against children. At the same time, awareness-raising was ongoing, i.a. to urge children to contact the emergency helpline 112 and disclose their experiences.

11. From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government collaborated closely with the educational community to ensure continuing right to education at all school levels and to promote students' functionality. A special emphasis was placed on support for vulnerable children and young people and children with a native language other than Icelandic, as well as their parents, including with a special financial contribution to *Móðurmál* – the Association on Bilingualism, for distance teaching for immigrants. A special contribution was allocated to upper secondary schools and universities to ensure opportunities for more people to receive education and training.

12. In recent years, various projects have been ongoing to halt the discontinuance of upper secondary school students, including in connection with COVID-19. Psychology services have been increased, as well as academic and vocational guidance. Alongside this, ways have been sought to improve the access of students to support services, especially mental health care. When the upper secondary schools had to close, emphasis was put on keeping in touch with the students, especially new and vulnerable students. Flexibility in submission of assignments was increased and the requirements for academic progress were relaxed by many schools.

13. In order to decrease the risk of children withdrawing from sports and leisure activities due to COVID-19, the authorities agreed to allocate special sports and leisure grants for low income families. The aim was to equalise children's opportunities for participation in organised leisure activities despite financial difficulties. It was also decided to grant financial support to those municipalities that considered it necessary to increase leisure activities for vulnerable children beyond the traditional summer activities. It focused especially on the 12–16 year age group and emphasised reaching those children who are least engaged in traditional summer activities.

14. In September 2021, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture published the book *Mundu að hnerra í regnbogann* (Remember to sneeze in the rainbow) containing the personal narratives of members of the educational community, including students, from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main aim of the project was to collect narratives in order to learn from people's experiences and use them for the future in the Icelandic educational system.

15. A special child benefit supplement was disbursed during the annual tax assessment for individuals at the end of May 2020 and 2021, in order to meet the economic effects of COVID-19. No application for this supplement was necessary since it was disbursed during the annual tax assessment.

Reply to paragraph 2 of the list of issues

16. Efforts are ongoing to set up a comprehensive system for collecting data on children's welfare and rights in Iceland. A Government steering committee on a children's welfare dashboard was set up in 2020. It is made up of representatives of seven Ministries, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, Statistics Iceland and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities. The committee is developing a dashboard that will give a comprehensive overview of children's welfare by publishing anonymous statistical data on children all over the country. The aforementioned Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution states that the dashboard shall be accessible to everyone and shall be taken into consideration in the priority ranking of projects and public policy-making.

Reply to paragraph 3 (a) of the list of issues

17. Contributions from the Local Authorities Equalization Fund are primarily intended to equalise the income and outlay needs of municipalities, making it possible for them to meet their legally mandated obligations. For example, contributions from the Fund make it possible to operate small schools in the smaller municipalities and pay the expense of school buses in rural areas. Most contributions from the Fund are allocated in a general way and are not earmarked for specific services. It is hard to ensure an equal standing of rural and urban areas as to access to services and quality thereof; instead, the focus is on improving services countrywide through specific actions, such as those of the Regional Plan.

Reply to paragraph 3 (b) of the list of issues

18. In June 2018, Althingi adopted a policy-making regional plan for 2018–2024. One of its objectives is to equalise access to services. This includes setting up interdisciplinary regional teams, the aim of which is to promote and increase comprehensive social, health and educational services. Another measure pertains to distance health-care services, proposing to try to equalise public access, including for children, to general and specialised health care services. Additionally, in May 2021, the Ministry of Transport and Local Government issued a white paper on regional matters and published it through the Government consultation portal. When the consultation process is finished, a proposal for parliamentary resolution on a 15-year policy-making regional plan and a 5-year action plan will be submitted to Althingi. The government is also making an effort to gather information and data into a special dashboard on child welfare (see also the response to question 2), which will enable better access to information about the status of children, including by residence.

Reply to paragraph 3 (c) of the list of issues

19. According to Article 102 of the Foreign Nationals Act, individuals “born in Iceland may not be denied entry to or expelled from Iceland if they have from birth been domiciled continuously in Iceland according to the National Registry”. The children of parents residing in Iceland without a residence permit are not considered to be domiciled in Iceland. Therefore children born to applicants for international protection may, in specific instances, be expelled. However, the situation of the children is always considered in each specific case, with a view to their best interests.

Reply to paragraph 4 (a) of the list of issues

20. The Act on the Ombudsman for Children provides that the Ombudsman shall convene a biennial Assembly on Child Matters. The first Assembly was convened in 2019, with 139 children participating. They were chosen at random from the civil status registry. Additionally, children from certain minority groups were specifically invited to participate. A report on the findings of the Assembly was published in May 2020 and had extensive effects on the development of the Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution. The findings of the Assembly on Child Matters have also been taken into consideration in the government’s general measures, as well as its responses to COVID-19. An Assembly on Child Matters was to be held in November 2021 but was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Assembly is expected to be held in the spring of 2022.

21. The Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution includes a measure aiming to use the findings of the Assembly on Child Matters in public policy-making in an even more systematic manner and to ensure follow-up on results within the Government. The procedure for such follow-up is being developed.

Reply to paragraph 4 (b) of the list of issues

22. No information is available on the age percentage of the children on the municipal youth councils; the municipalities have flexibility as regards the councils’ composition. In October 2021, the Ombudsman for Children’s advisory group of children aged of 12–17 was composed of 21 children (six born in 2004, one in 2005, two in 2006, three in 2007, six in 2008, and three in 2009). The Sustainable Development Goals Youth Council is appointed biennially and the term of the current council has been extended to the end of 2021 because of COVID-19. The youth council is composed of 12 representatives aged 14–19 (two born in 2002, three in 2003, one in 2004, two in 2005, and two in 2006). When the next council is appointed, it will only be composed of children who will not have reached the age of 18 when their term of office ends. The Directorate of Education no longer has a special youth council, but has made an agreement with the youth organisation Samfés about children’s participation in decision-making and advisory activities.

Reply to paragraph 4 (c) of the list of issues

23. No amendments have been made to the legal framework for youth councils since Iceland’s report was submitted to the Committee. However, most municipalities that operate youth councils have their own rules thereon. The Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution includes a measure aimed at amending the Youth Act, No 70/2007, to oblige municipalities to establish youth councils, as well as clarifying their functions, responsibilities and mandates. The review is expected to be finished by the end of 2022. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs made an agreement with Samfés in the autumn of 2020 with the goal of increasing cooperation on projects relating to nationwide democratic participation of young people in decision-making.

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

24. In the autumn of 2018, following the memorandum of cooperation and the steering group’s work on actions against violence, a plan on actions against violence was submitted to Althingi. A plan of action against violence and its consequences for 2019–2022 was adopted in June 2019. Its principal aim is to promote awareness of the issue through

prevention and education, improve working methods and procedures within the justice administration system, and to enhance support for victims.

25. Various measures included in the aforementioned plan on action against violence and its consequences pertain to protecting children against violence, especially through education and preventive measures. The measures already implemented for protecting children against violence include:

- The development of a website with educational material about violence, including examples of procedures and toolboxes that school staff at all school levels can use when there is suspicion of violence, neglect, etc. Efforts are ongoing to enhance knowledge about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and for it to become the basis for all activities involving children;
- A Sports and Youth Activities Communication Counsellor began operations at the beginning of 2020. The Communication Counsellor is an independent entity that can assist and guide those who consider themselves to have been the victims of violence or discrimination in sports or youth activities;
- Support for the National Parents' Association for the *SAFT* and *No hate* projects will continue. These are projects that entail raising awareness about children's safe use of technology and trying to combat hate speech, racism and discrimination on the Internet;
- Study materials about equality and gender are being prepared for preschools, compulsory and upper secondary schools to support prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment;
- A centre for information about violence against children has been established. Its role is to record information, statistics, research and other matters pertaining to this issue. The project is still in the trial stage, but a future arrangement is in the works.

26. A proposal for a parliamentary resolution on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment among children and young people was adopted by Althingi in the summer of 2020, along with an action plan for 2021–2025. Its goal includes promoting preventive measures among children and young people. The preventive measures will be integrated into teaching and school activities at all school levels and will be implemented by after-school activity centres and youth centres, in sports and youth activities and other recreational activities. The actions laid out in the plan are fully financed and various parties within the administrative system are responsible for the implementation of specific projects; the follow-up is in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office's Department of Equality. Visit the Government Offices website to see an overview of the progress of these actions.

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

Measures to promote reporting of cases of child sexual abuse

27. An emphasis has been placed on educating people about the requirement to report cases to the child protection authorities, especially the reporting requirement for those who work with children. The aforementioned plan on action against violence includes an action intended to increase education about violence among people who work with children, including a focus on the reporting requirement of the Child Protection Act.

28. Efforts have been made to make it easier for children to contact the child protection authorities. The 112 emergency helpline receives notifications on behalf of the child protection committees around the clock. Standby services for child protection emergencies can be reached through the hotline on weekends and public holidays. Children and young people can find educational materials about violence, resources, etc. on the 112 website, and children can contact the hotline through a net chat.

Measures to ensure effective investigations, prosecutions and sanctions

29. Police detectives investigating physical, psychological and sexual violence against children attend special courses about such offences. The police and child protection

authorities work closely together to investigate offences against children. See also the coverage on the Children's House in Iceland's report.

30. The police are obliged to prepare an electronic protocol for investigating sexual violence. This gives a better overview of cases for both police and prosecutors, as well as preventing errors in the investigation, resulting in higher quality investigations and prosecutions. The technological capacity of police officers has also been increased with regard to social media, which has resulted in more effective investigations and prosecutions and led to sentencing.

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

31. Data from the Children's House shows an increase from previous years in cases of sexual violence against children by other children. In 2018, 48 cases were recorded and in November 2021 the case count had risen to 74. The number of investigative interviews has also risen, i.e. more children are disclosing such violence. The response has been to offer the victims trauma therapy, as well as offering psychological counselling to perpetrators because of their inappropriate sexual behaviour.

32. An action team against violence was set up in May 2020, i.a. to respond to the effects of COVID-19. The team made proposals on permanent support for vulnerable children to decrease the likelihood of them perpetrating violent offences. The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police is working on forming rules for the national police force on procedures for investigating, respectively, violent offences among children and young people and cooperation with other institutions on preventing crime among this group. There is a special focus on procedure and criteria on tips and notifications between police, child protection authorities and schools with regard to violence against children. Efforts are also being made to set up a procedure for awareness-raising among children and young people, in consultation with them. Information about the procedure will be disseminated within the police force and training for investigating children's violent offences will be increased.

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

33. No special actions have been taken to increase public awareness of the practice of circumcision, but there has been considerable public discussion on the matter, i.a. in connection with inquiries and proposals for parliamentary resolution that have been submitted to Althingi in recent years.

34. No boys have been circumcised at the Barnaspítali Hringins children's hospital for many years, except in medically indicated cases. Additionally, paediatric surgeons in Iceland do not carry out this procedure at their clinics except when medically indicated. Circumcision for religious reasons at the request of a child's legal guardians is not carried out at the children's hospital and there have been no changes since the last responses were submitted. Cases where a child is admitted to the hospital due to complication from this procedure will be reported to the child protection committee concerned. One procedure has been carried out at the Akureyri Hospital for religious reasons in recent years – the circumcision of a young boy in 2019. It should be stated that the Directorate of Health only has information about procedures that have been carried out at Icelandic hospitals and health care institutions. The Directorate does not have any information about procedures that may have been carried out at independent speciality clinics, in religious ceremonies or under other circumstances.

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

35. Under Article 33a of the Children Act, No 76/2003, parents shall be obliged to attempt to reach agreement before requesting a ruling or instituting a court action on custody, domicile, access, per diem fines or enforcement measures. When there is information available regarding violence in intimate relationships, the accepted procedure is to inform those involved that they can request to attend mediation separately; additionally, a decision can be made to use a different procedure with more focus on elements that are likely to have a certain deterrent effect under the specific circumstance. Mediation can also be considered to have taken place although parents do not attend meetings they have been invited to. The

parties are therefore under no circumstances forced to turn up for or attend mediation meetings.

36. The Children Act provides that whatever is in the best interests of children shall take precedence in all cases concerning them that are being handled by District Commissioner's offices. The aim of mediation is to promote better communication between parents and endeavour to assist them to reach a real and permanent agreement on whatever outcome that is considered to be best for the child. The Children Act also includes several provisions that aim to ensure that the outcomes of cases are in the children's best interests, including their right to participate. Additionally, an expert on children's issues can be hired at any stage of a case to talk with a child or give an opinion on specific matters of dispute, such as the risk of a child being subjected to violence.

37. It should be noted that the aim is to establish, in keeping with the aforementioned Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution, a working group to formulate a Child impact assessment procedure that will be systematically implemented, including in decision-making on cases involving individual children, such as on the basis of the Children Act.

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

38. In 2016, the Government Agency for Child Protection started implementing Málavog, a measuring tool to evaluate the strain on child protection committee case managers. The tool records the work strain for each employee to give managers a better overview of the situation in the workplace and of changes over time. This method offers an opportunity to measure the development over time for both individual employees and for the workplace and is considered to give a better overview of the scope of the work than by just looking at the number of cases and notifications. Further information about the Málavog tool and the results of a survey made by the Government Agency for Child Protection in 2021 can be found on its website.¹

39. In recent years, the Government Agency for Child Protection has been working on implementing ESTER, an evaluation tool for child protection employees, to be used to investigate cases and measure changes in the well-being and circumstances of children and families. Additionally, preparations have started to implement the Signs of Safety procedures and ideology into the activities of social workers and other professional classes working in child protection and social services. Signs of Safety is a method that entails cooperation between systems, with parents and with children to a greater extent than is now the case in child protection and social services. It is to be hoped that this method will make the work of child protection authorities more efficient and therefore lessen the strain on their employees. The Government Agency for Child Protection has also been working on various operating procedures in cooperation with child protection committees with the aim to facilitate and lighten the work of child protection authorities.

Reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues

40. The Ministry of Justice has been making efforts to shorten the waiting times for rulings in family matters at District Commissioners' offices, especially in cases awaiting mediation. Efforts have been made to specifically reinforce the Office of the District Commissioner of Greater Reykjavík, which handles mediation procedures for all the District Commissioners' offices in Iceland. A plan on action to shorten the waiting times was prepared in the autumn of 2020, and in January 2021 the situation was evaluated, revealing various improvements that could be made. Following that, various changes were made to the Office's procedures, including increasing the number of officers with a law education. The Ministry has also allocated an operating subsidy of 11 m. ISK to the Office, to shorten the waiting time for an interview with an expert.

41. In August 2020, the Westman Islands District Commissioner's Office began assisting the Reykjavík Office by holding divorce hearings using online conferencing technology. The Office has also, since the beginning of 2021, handled matters concerning marriage eligibility inquiries, and consideration is being given to transferring even more tasks from the Reykjavík

¹ <https://www.bvs.is/fyrir-fagfolk/malavog/>.

Office's Family & Social Welfare Department to the Westman Islands District Commissioner's Office. These measures have made the waiting times considerably shorter. Additionally, increased budgetary allocations have been used to enhance the District Commissioners' work and information systems to increase the efficiency of computer systems and facilitate public access to information, e.g. through net chats.

42. Most municipalities offer parents the opportunity to receive social counselling when they apply for services from the municipality. In recent years, efforts have been made to implement and develop new working procedures to enhance counselling and education with an emphasis on divorce, custody and access cases under the project *Samvinna eftir skilnað*.² The goal is to reduce disputes between parents during divorce proceedings. The www.samvinnaeftirskilnad.is website is open to the public and offers electronic courses with thoroughly tested study material, free of charge. Additionally, an emphasis has been placed on experts working on family matters for municipal social services attending a special course, SES-PRO, to obtain the skills to conduct specialised counselling for individuals in such cases.

Children in alternative care settings

43. In 2010 and 2011, the Centre for Children and Family Research (ICE-CCFR) conducted, at the request of the Government Agency for Child Protection, a large-scale survey of how children who were placed in the Agency's treatment centres in 2000–2007, had fared. The Agency then invited all those who claimed to have been subjected to violence to come in for an interview. The goal of the interviews was to gain better insight and understanding of the perception and experiences of individuals who stayed in the treatment centres and how to improve the operations of treatment centres. The interviews were conducted in 2013. No further inquiries have been made into the situation of the children after their time in alternative care ended.

Reply to paragraph 7 of the list of issues

Sterilisation procedures

44. Article 3(2) of Act No 35/2019 on Sterilisation Procedures provides that sterilisation of children may only be carried out when fertility is considered to have serious effects on the life and health of the child. In order to ensure that such decisions are only made if it is in a child's best interests, the attestation of two doctors is required and the child shall be appointed a special legal guardian who will guard their interests when the decision is made. The comments on this provision reiterate the importance of respecting the gradually increasing right of children to self-determination, as well as the provision of Article 26(1) of the Patients' Rights Act, No 74/1997, which states that children should be consulted as far as possible and always if they are over 12 years of age.

Measures in response to the decline in children's mental health, and services in compulsory and upper secondary schools

45. The Ministry of Health has been conducting a mental health care campaign in recent years and has increased the contribution to this sector by over one billion ISK in the last four years. A vision for the future of mental health care up to 2030 is being formulated along with the appropriate action plans. During that work, a special emphasis is placed on children's mental health, based in part on two recent reports on, respectively, a 2018 analysis and future vision for children's and young people's mental health matters, and a 2021 report on the future organisation of health care for children and young people with substance use and addiction problems.

46. The Ministers of Health and Social Affairs and Children hired independent advisers to conduct an analysis of the waiting times for children in need of health care and social services and to make proposals for improvement. The Ministries have taken this analysis and

² The project is being conducted on the basis of an agreement with the Danish company Samarbejde Efter Skilsmisse APS and is currently experimental.

the proposals into consideration in the ongoing reform process to improve children's welfare and formulate a vision for the future of mental health care.

47. Around four thousand people participated in the Ministry of Health's mental health conference in 2020, which worked on formulating a vision of the future of mental health care for children and adults up to 2030. A large-scale workshop on the right mental health care services in the right place was then held in June 2021. The goal of the workshop was to improve services for children and adults with mental health problems, increase their efficiency and shorten the waiting lists.

48. Restructuring of secondary mental health care services for children is under way, to better meet the needs of children and reduce delays in services. In 2019, a working committee on the promotion of mental health in schools submitted to the Minister of Health proposals for a systematic implementation of the promotion of mental health, prevention and support for children and young people at school. The plan was made concurrently with the complete revision of matters concerning children that was taking place in cooperation across all Ministries, and has important parallels with the new Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity. The action plan was adopted by the government in 2020 and a steering committee under the leadership of the Directorate of Health was established in 2021 to pursue the actions.

49. A working group that was tasked with reviewing tried and tested methods to reduce the rate of suicides and attempted suicides by young people in Iceland submitted its proposals to the Minister of Health in 2018. The group submitted a comprehensive suicide prevention action plan covering all age groups rather than only young people, since the lowest suicide rate in Iceland is among children. However, the plan also included special actions directed at young people. The Minister of Health approved the proposals and allocated temporary funding to the position of a suicide prevention project manager at the Directorate of Health to follow up on the action plan.

50. In 2019, a large-scale Nordic joint action for mental health and well-being in early life was launched under the leadership of the Directorate of Health. The project concerns how the Nordic countries promote good mental health and well-being during pregnancy, strengthen the bonds between parents and young children, find and respond to risk factors in early life and promote the well-being of the youngest children in preschools and day-care. In 2022, policy-making proposals will be made on the basis of the outcome of this project, which examines how the Nordic countries, including Iceland, can better promote good mental health and well-being of children and their parents in those important first years of life that are so vital for mental health throughout life.

51. The Directorate of Health has had a long-running cooperation with the country's compulsory and upper secondary schools to implement a health-promoting ideology and procedures to support health, including mental health, and well-being among children and young people at school. Around the middle of 2021, around a third of all preschools in Iceland, two-thirds of compulsory schools and all the upper secondary schools were participating in this approach. In recent years, the Directorate has also cooperated with municipalities to implement the health-promoting ideology on a broad social basis under the title Health-Promoting Society. Partners in this cooperation receive special mental health check-lists covering how the mental health and well-being of children and young people can be systematically promoted by schools and municipalities.

52. Additionally, health care institutions are running various new projects concerning children's health promotion. One example is the nation-wide implementation by primary health care institutions of a tried and tested parent-oriented treatment for anxiety in children aged 6–12. The implementation of a tried and tested functional training method to treat anxiety and depression in children aged 13–16 is under way. Emphasis has also been placed on increasing interdisciplinary cooperation in the form of family teams and treatment and consultation teams representing health care institutions, social services, child protection authorities, schools and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department of the National University Hospital. The government has also supported various projects concerned with improving children's mental health. See also the aforementioned response to question 1(c) on responses to COVID-19.

Information about the increased use of prescription medicines

53. According to the ATC classification system, hypnotics and sedatives are classified under ATC subgroup N05C. This subgroup comprises medicines that are generally referred to as hypnotics, especially benzodiazepine and related drugs. They are classified as addictive and narcotic substances. This subgroup also includes medicines containing the active chemical melatonin, which is not classified as addictive or narcotic. ATC subgroup N05B includes anxiolytic medicines. Many such medicines are classified as addictive or narcotic substances. This subgroup also includes hydroxyzine (Atarax) which is an antihistamine used to treat itching that is also approved as an anxiolytic medication for adults. Hydroxyzine is not addictive or narcotic. This information is included because when the terms hypnotics and sedatives are used, they generally refer to substances considered to be addictive or narcotic. The use of such medicines for children, especially young children, is minimal in Iceland. When examining statistical information on such medicines, it must be kept in mind that some of them are also used to treat epilepsy and other illnesses. Additionally, certain antihistamines in the subgroup R06AD are not only used to treat allergies, but are also given to children because they cause drowsiness and thus promote sleep. This refers especially to promethazine (Phenergan) and alimemazin (Vallergan). If trends the use of these substances are examined, it becomes clear that the use of the ones considered to be addictive or narcotic is minimal. The use of antihistamines that cause drowsiness is considerable and slowly growing. However, children are increasingly being given melatonin. When reference is made to the use of hypnotics, this refers first and foremost to an increased use of melatonin. For further information, refer to Annex I.

Age limit for children's access to sexual and reproductive health services

54. The Patients' Rights Act provides that children must have reached the age of 16 to agree to medical procedures without the involvement of their parents. It has been considered appropriate, in keeping with parents' duty to exercise custody, for parents of children under 16 to be involved in decisions concerning children's medical treatments; however, children are guaranteed the right to an increasing degree of influence on such decisions in keeping with their age and maturity. However, it should be noted that the Termination of Pregnancy Act provides that girls of all ages can undergo a termination of pregnancy without the involvement of their custodians. Additionally, children of all ages have the right to seek advice from health-care workers on their own initiative, including advice about sexual and reproductive health. In relation to this it should be noted that school nurses operate within all compulsory schools (see Iceland's report).

Reply to question 8 of the list of issues

55. The main findings of the report on the standards of living and poverty among children in Iceland in 2004–2016 show that on the whole, the living conditions of children in Iceland are good compared with other European countries. In 2016, the living standards of children in Iceland were the 6th best in Europe, measured as equivalised disposable income. The report's finding showed that the most urgent action needed was improving the living standards of single parents and their children. Nearly 4 out of every 10 children under the low-income threshold were children of single parents. Housing costs have a bigger effect on poverty among the children of single parents than among children living in other types of households.

56. The report provided a number of diverse proposals, including bridging the care gap between the end of parental leave and until children enter preschool. As covered in more detail in the response to question 15, the parental leave was extended to 12 months in 2021. A proposal to increase social transfers to single parents was also made. Since the report was published, changes have been made to the child benefit system in order to ensure that child benefits can be of better use for low-income families and single parents. In 2021, the lower cut-off income threshold for recipients of child benefits was raised, including for single parents. The report also set out proposals pertaining to increasing the subsidisation of recreational activities. After COVID-19 struck, the government agreed to allocate temporary special support to sports and recreational activities for children living in lower income homes. Furthermore, a decision has been made to continue to direct efforts, in collaboration with

municipalities, at equalising opportunities for children to pursue leisure activities regardless of income, circumstances and residence

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

57. In recent years, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been working to systematically reduce the discontinuance of upper secondary school students. The Ministry began measuring the annual discontinuance rate of new students in upper secondary schools in 2018. Research has been conducted regarding the causes of discontinuance, especially among boys and students whose native language is not Icelandic. The aim is to use this information on the causes of discontinuance in policy-making, i.a. to form more focused solutions to prevent discontinuance, as well as preventive and compensatory measures. The Ministry is participating in an inquiry into discontinuance and delays in education at the upper secondary level under the auspices of the Welfare Watch. Statistical analysis and report-writing are under way. The Ministry is also carrying out data analysis in relation to discontinuance at the upper secondary school level.

58. In 2020, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture established a working group on early support in the education system, with representatives from all the key stakeholders of the education system. The goal of the group is to improve well-being and academic results among students, especially boys, with a focus on early support and thus reduce school avoidance and discontinuance.

59. A working group established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and various education system stakeholders is working to review the exemption chapter of the national curriculum guide for compulsory schools. The group's functions include for example producing criteria on school attendance and considering the Welfare Watch's proposals to reduce the number of school avoidant students.

60. A working group on students with a plurilingual and pluricultural background submitted a report in May 2020. The aim of the report was to analyse the status of this group within the education system and set out proposals for improvement and ideas about measures. This group's work was part of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's preparation of the 2030 education policy. One of the main actions in the first action plan based on the new education policy pertains to systematic support for students with a diverse linguistic and cultural background. The aim is that the Icelandic education system should meet the educational and social needs of these students at all school levels and types of schools so they stand on an equal footing with their peers, attain good Icelandic language skills and take an active part in study, play and Icelandic society.

61. A working group on a registration system for compulsory school children was established in the spring of 2020. Its role is to define the needs and wishes that a central registration system must fulfil and examine how extensive such a system needs to be, including with a view to whether to record school attendance. In light of the emphasis on cross-system integration and harmonisation, the working group believes it is urgent to establish a database for registration of compulsory school pupils as soon as possible, as such a system would facilitate the education authorities' control obligations and support an efficient implementation of the 2030 education policy.

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

62. The education policy for 2021–2030 was adopted by Parliament in the spring of 2021 with the objective of enhancing education for the nation. The policy emphasises equal opportunities and education for all and the goal is to take into consideration the needs, abilities and competence of each student while working with their individual strengths and interests. Two experts have been hired for the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's new school development team, which is intended to follow up on the objectives of the policy.

63. The first action plan of the new education policy was submitted in September 2021. It was the result of extensive consultation and analysis that has been ongoing since 2018. The aim of that work was to clarify the vision for the development and structuring of the Icelandic education system for the future, in view of the challenges it faces, including rapid societal and technological changes. The first action plan lays out nine main actions which pertain to

the five pillars of the new education policy: equal opportunities for all, first-class teaching, proficiency for the future, well-being as a principle, and quality at the forefront.

64. Implementation of proposals from an interdisciplinary working committee on education, work, sports and leisure activities for students with disabilities who have finished a specialised four-year upper secondary school course for people with disabilities is currently under way and is intended to increase the students' functionality and independence in society.

65. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture supports Menntafléttan, a collective aimed at strengthening learning communities in school and leisure activities throughout the country by developing courses that are intertwined with daily work. The courses are free of charge for teachers and other education system employees. The courses cover a wide range of studies, teaching, sustainable development, well-being, leisure activities and leadership.

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

66. There is a strong emphasis on literacy in the education policy for 2030, the 2019 action plan to promote the Icelandic language, and the Icelandic Language Council's new 2021 language policy. At the start of 2021, an agreement was made on a 3-year cooperation project to enhance preschool and compulsory school pupils' Icelandic language competence and strengthen their self-image. The aim is to enhance the literacy of all pupils, especially language stimulus, language development, vocabulary and reading comprehension of students with native languages other than Icelandic, and to promote their well-being and engagement with their studies.

67. A research project began in the autumn of 2021 that follows pupils of the Westman Islands compulsory school from the beginning of their primary school education and until they graduate 10 years later. The goal is to improve school activities and success with a focus on the importance of efficient optimisation of education research, for educational reform. The project focuses on pupils' literacy and improved well-being, on mathematics, natural history, physical exercise and pupils' mindset. The cooperation is grounded in changed emphases in the implementation and organisation of school activities, with the interests of pupils in mind. There is an emphasis on transferring the knowledge and outcomes of the project to other compulsory schools in the country and to the school authorities.

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

68. The national curriculum guide for compulsory schools does not specifically discuss online violence, since at the time it was prepared the discussion on the subject had not become as prominent as it is now. However, the fundamental pillars of education according to the national curriculum guide include human rights, equality, health and welfare. All of these elements are interconnected, and special reference is made to the fact that human rights will only be ensured by promoting the health and welfare of everyone and fighting discrimination and every kind of violence, including bullying. Additionally, the chapter on school culture states that a positive school culture is, by its very nature, preventive and can reduce negative interactions such as bullying and other violence.

69. All schools are required to have in place a prevention programme, a plan against bullying and other violence, a safety and accident prevention plan, and a policy on discipline management. These plans are required to bring in prevention and responses to all kinds of violence, including online-based. See also the discussion in Iceland's report on the SAFT project, which is an awareness-raising campaign on positive computer and new media use by children and young people in Iceland, developed in a wide-ranging collaboration between many different entities. The focus points in SAFT include online ethics, data protection, media literacy, smart devices and digital citizenship.

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues

70. See the discussion on minimum age of employment and the age of ending compulsory education in Iceland's report, as well as actions to ensure children's protection from unsafe or harmful working conditions.

Reply to paragraph 11 of the list of issues

71. In the spring of 2019, the government published its emphases on actions to combat human trafficking and other kinds of exploitation, in compliance with Iceland's obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Ten actions were set out on the basis of these emphases, one of which concerns identification, assistance and protection of children. This action requires the child protection authorities to prepare a clear and efficient procedure for identifying children who are suspected victims of trafficking. The child protection authorities are also required to prepare instructions and procedures for experts working with children on how to act when there is suspicion of child trafficking.

72. Children, as well as adults, have access to the National Referral Mechanism for Human Trafficking, which was established in July 2020. Its main role is to coordinate procedures and responses in suspected cases of human trafficking, e.g. by bringing in the necessary experts. Victims of trafficking, both children and adults, can also make a direct call to the 112 emergency operators to receive assistance, advice on where they can turn to, etc.

73. For more information, refer to the responses to question 5(b) and (c) regarding successful prosecution and investigation of cases concerning offences against children.

Reply to paragraph 12 (a) of the list of issues

74. In 2007, the provisions of the General Penal Code, No 19/1940, on prostitution were amended so that making a livelihood from prostitution is no longer a punishable offence. Children who are subjected to abuse through prostitution can therefore not be punished for it under Icelandic law.

Reply to paragraph 12 (b) of the list of issues

75. Article 194(1) of the General Penal Code provides that any person who has sexual intercourse or other sexual relations with a person without that person's consent is guilty of rape. Article 195 provides that it shall be considered as increasing the severity of the punishment if the victim is a child under the age of 18. There are also special provisions on sexual offences against children.

76. Article 200(1) provides that "Any person who has sexual intercourse or other sexual relations with his or her own child or other descendant shall be imprisoned for up to 8 years and up to 12 years if the child 15, 16 or 17 years of age." Article 200(2) provides that "Sexual harassment of a type other than that specified in the first paragraph of this Article and directed at the perpetrator's own child or other descendant shall be punishable by up to 4 years' imprisonment, providing that the child is aged 15 years or older."

77. Article 201(1) provides that "Any person who has sexual intercourse or other sexual relations with a child aged 15, 16 or 17 year who is his or her adopted child, step-child, foster-child or the child of his or her cohabiting partner, or is bound to him or her by similar family relationships in direct line of descent, or is a child who has been committed to his or her authority for education or upbringing, shall be imprisoned for up to 12 years." Article 201(2) provides that "Sexual harassment of a type other than that specified in the first paragraph of this article shall be punishable by up to 4 years' imprisonment."

78. Article 202(3) provides that "Any person who, by deception, gifts or in any other way entices a child under the age of 18 years to engage in sexual intercourse or other sexual relations shall be imprisoned for up to 4 years."

79. Article 206(2) provides that "Any person who pays, or promises payment or any other type of consideration, for prostitution on the part of a child under the age of 18 shall be fined or imprisoned for up to 2 years." Article 206(4) of the General Penal Code provides that "deceiving, encouraging or assisting a child under the age of 18 to engage in prostitution" is punishable by an imprisonment of up to 4 years.

80. Education for children and young people about violence and resources related thereto has been increased; see, for example, the discussion about the 112.is website in the response to question 5(c).

Reply to paragraph 12 (c) of the list of issues

81. See the response to question 12(b) about the protection of children against sexual violence. See also paragraphs 218 and 219 in Iceland's report regarding child sexual abuse material. Article 227 of the General Penal Code includes provisions on human trafficking, under which "Procuring, transporting, handing over, housing or accepting an individual younger than 18 years of age" for the purpose of sexually using him/her or for forced labour or to remove their organs, is punishable by law.

82. Under Article 19(d) of the General Penal Code, a "legal person may be made to incur criminal liability for violations" of the Act when certain conditions are fulfilled.

Reply to paragraph 13 of the list of issues

83. The discrepancy in the number of applicants for international protection on the one hand and the number of admittances and rejections on the other is due to applicants who withdrew their applications, left the country before their application had been processed, are still being processed or received a residence permit due to humanitarian reasons.

Audit by the Ministry of Justice and responses to it

84. In December 2020, the Ministry of Justice published a report summarising the situation regarding children seeking international protection in Iceland, along with proposals for improvement.³ The summary shows that the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are reflected to a large degree in Icelandic laws and regulations that concern child refugees. The summary also showed that the rights of children are respected in fact, including the principle that the interests of children should be taken into consideration, the rights of children to participate in matters concerning them, the principle of family unity, the right of children to an education and appropriate health and spiritual care services. However, it became clear during the summarising work that there is still room for change and improvement, and so nine proposals have been put forward for further improvement of the status of children seeking international protection. One of the proposals has already been implemented and preparations are under way for the rest. In the spring of 2021, the Directorate of Immigration finished preparing procedures for a best interest assessment, including unaccompanied children seeking international protection. Preparations are under way to establish a working group that will be entrusted with elaborating those proposals that require legal amendments.

Information about the procedures of the Immigration and Asylum Appeals Board regarding children

85. The Immigration and Asylum Appeals Board examines cases that are appealed to it in conformity with the provisions of the Foreign Nationals Act, No 80/2016. Since its inception, the Appeals Board has assessed the interests of children in keeping with the principle of doing whatever is best for them, both for unaccompanied children and children who arrive in Iceland with their custodians. To ensure that the assessment is made in conformity with Iceland's international obligations, the Board prepared, in 2019, its rules of procedure for a best interest assessment. The rules of procedure were prepared in consultation with UNICEF Iceland and the Ombudsman for Children and were based on how the Board processes such cases. The general comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the instructions of UNHCR and EASO about child protection, were also taken into account. The rules of procedure are accessible on the Board's website in English.⁴ The rules

³ <https://www.stjornarradid.is/gogn/rit-og-skysrslur/stakt-rit/2020/12/15/Tillogur-til-urbota-a-stodu-barna-i-leit-ad-althjodlegri-vernd/>.

⁴ <https://www.knu.is/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Kaerunefnd-mat-a-verklagsreglum-v-barns-sem-saekir-um-althjodlega-vernd-thytt.pdf>.

of procedure include an overview of the elements the Board specifically examines in its reviews of the Directorate of Immigration's decisions, and the elements it takes into account when assessing a child's interests and whether it is in the child's best interests as to safety, welfare and social development to return to the native country or be granted protection or a residence permit in Iceland.

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

86. All refugees, including children, are offered psychological support. That support is not, however, specifically designed to speedily identify children who may have been involved in armed conflict, although of course this may come out through interviews.

Reply to paragraph 14 (b), (c) and (d) of the list of issues

87. Iceland has neither a military force nor military conscription. The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict was transposed into law in 2013 through Act No 19/2013, making violations of the protocol a crime. Under Act No 144/2018 on Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and the Crime of Aggression, it is a punishable war crime to recruit children under 18 into the armed forces of a State or have children under 18 participate in armed conflict (see Articles 3 and 4 of the Act).

Part two

Reply to paragraph 15 (a) of the list of issues – Legislation

88. Large-scale work has been ongoing since the spring of 2018 on amendments that benefit children, including a wide-ranging comprehensive review of the legal environment in this policy area. This encompasses a new comprehensive Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity No 86/2021, a new Act on the National Agency for Children and Families No 87/2021, and a new Act on the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Integrated Services No 88/2021. Additionally, amendments were made to the Child Protection Act, No 80/2002, and the Act on the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, No 83/2003. The amendments entered into force in 2022. A large number of new regulations will be issued in connection with these law amendments and the current regulations will either be revised or repealed. Additionally, further amendments must be made in the policy areas of various Ministries with regard to the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity. That work is ongoing and the adoption process is expected to take three to five years.

89. The main objective of the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity is obstacle-free access to services for children and parents. The aim of these provisions is to formalise cooperation on offering services for the benefit of children and create conditions to enable early assistance and appropriate support. There are various novel provisions in this Act, including ensuring all children and, as the case may be, parents during pregnancy, access to a coordinator. The coordinator is an individual in the child's close environment who has enough knowledge to assist parents and children when necessary, e.g. by informing them where they can seek services, and assisting them in securing access to services. Using a coordinator creates an opportunity to bring a child's case quickly and safely into the correct process, promote efficiency in basic services and ensure access to early support for parents and children. If a child needs further services, a case manager takes over the case. The Act also provides that all services benefiting children shall be divided into three service levels. Various other novelties can be found in this body of law, including on policy-making, both at the State and municipal levels.

90. Amendments to the Child Protection Act aim to increase the emphasis on expert knowledge of child protection staff and the integration of child protection into other services for children. There is also an emphasis on clearer accountability of those who work in the field of children's rights and protection, on promoting children's participation in the handling of child protection cases, and on increasing children's rights to receive information about their cases in a child-friendly manner. Additionally, the handling of specific child protection

measures has been simplified, especially solutions regarding those who work with children, cases concerning the removal of a family member from the home, and restraining orders and solutions concerning unborn children. A comprehensive revision of the Child Protection Act is foreseen.

91. The parental leave was extended to 12 months in 2021, with each parent having a right to 6 months. Parents can transfer up to 6 weeks of leave, so that one parent can take up to 7 1/2 months of leave while the other takes 4 1/2 months. The maximum payments have also been raised to up to 600,000 ISK per month.

92. The Children Act, No 76/2003, was amended in the spring of 2021 to permit parents who do not live together but exercise joint custody over a child to negotiate split residence for the child under certain circumstances. Split residence entails that all decisions made by the parents of a child with split residence will be joint. The child will then be registered in the civil status records as residing with both parents, i.e. as being legally domiciled in one home and resident in the other. These amendments will, i.a., enable both parents whose child has split residence to receive social support in the form of child benefits and interest relief. Amendments were also made to the provisions of the Children Act to make it easier for parents to negotiate child support and maintenance payments. The Act provides that the precondition for parents to negotiate split residence is that parents are able to cooperate sufficiently and consult with each other about the child. The Act stresses that parents must always take into consideration whatever is best for the child's circumstances and needs when negotiating matters like custody, residence and access. The Act also includes the novel provision that a child can take the initiative for the District Commissioner to invite the parents to an interview to discuss arrangements for custody, domicile, residence and access. This considerably strengthens the rights of children to participate in matters that concern them and increases the likelihood of children being able to live in conditions that support, in a constructive way, their well-being and development. Amendments were also made to the provisions on children's right to express their opinions, to further strengthen children's right to participation.

93. The Act on Gender Autonomy, No 80/2019, was adopted in the summer of 2019. That Act provides for the right of individuals to define their own gender and thereby aims to guarantee the recognition of the gender identity of each and every person. In December 2020 the age criterion for changing the official gender registration was lowered from 18 years to 15 years. Additionally, the right of intersex children to be spared from unnecessary surgical procedures was ensured, to protect their physical integrity. The Children Act was also amended and provisions were added on the parental position of trans people and individuals with a gender-neutral registration, in order to better ensure protection for different family types and respect for children's diverse families.

94. Various laws were amended in the summer of 2019, e.g. the Patients' Rights Act, the Healthcare Practitioners Act, Children Act and acts on all the school levels. The objective of the amendments was to ensure proper support and counselling for children who lose a parent, due to illness or death, and respect for their right to associate with close relatives of the deceased parent or other persons close to them.

95. Various amendments have been made to the General Penal Code in order to strengthen the standing of victims of violence, including children. In February 2021, the Act on the Protection of Sexual Privacy was adopted. Its objective is to increase protection against digital sexual violence and promote increased personal liberty, security of person and sexual liberty of individuals. That same month, the Act on Stalking was adopted, which aims to strengthen even further the protection of those subjected to stalking, especially women and children. The Act makes it punishable to threaten, follow, monitor, contact or, through other comparable means, stalk another person if the behaviour is repeated and conducive to causing fear or anxiety.

96. The Termination of Pregnancy Act, No 43/2019, entered into force in the autumn of 2019. It entails considerable changes to the law on termination of pregnancy in Iceland, for example by no longer requiring the involvement of parents in the decision of an under-age girl to undergo a termination. See further explanations in the response to question 7.

97. The Act on Sterilisation Procedures, No 35/2019, entered into force in the spring of 2019. The aim of that law includes ensuring that sterilisation of children is only carried out when fertility is considered to have serious negative effects on the life and health of the child. See further explanations in the response to question 7 in part 1.

98. A new Traffic Law, No 77/2019, entered into force on 1 January 2020. The objectives of the law include increasing traffic safety. It includes the provision that those responsible for main roads shall take measures in consultation with school authorities and the police to protect children against traffic dangers on their way to and from school. The law also specifically provides that children in preschools, compulsory and secondary schools shall receive education about traffic.

Reply to paragraph 15 (b) of the list of issues

New institutions

99. A new Children's House (Barnahus) was established in Akureyri in 2019. Therefore Children's Houses are now operating both in the northern region and in the greater capital area, thus ensuring better access to necessary specialist services for children outside the capital area.

100. Two new governmental institutions started their operations on 1 January 2022: the National Agency for Children and Families and the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Integrated Services (see also the response to question 1(b)).

101. A detoxification ward for minors was established at the National University Hospital in June 2020 and is operated by the addiction unit of the Mental Health Services department. It consists of two treatment spaces where young people with a serious drug addiction can be admitted for 1–3 days, following which other resources take over. An interdisciplinary treatment team will care for these young people and their families during their stay, in cooperation with the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department (BUGL).

Reply to paragraph 15 (c) of the list of issues

New policies

102. In June 2021, Althingi adopted the Child-Friendly Iceland parliamentary resolution, the aim of which is to ensure a comprehensive implementation of the CRC; see also the response to question 1(a) and the attached document.

103. A child protection implementation plan for 2019–2022 was adopted in June 2019. It provides that children shall be a priority in all approaches and service systems for children and families shall work together in an efficient manner to improve the well-being of children and the environment in which they are raised.

104. A parliamentary resolution on measures against violence for 2022 was adopted by Althingi in 2019. It covers different manifestations of violence, such as physical, sexual, psychological and gender-based violence, bullying, hate speech and publication on social media of images that encourage violence; see also the response to question 5.

105. In June 2019, Althingi adopted a parliamentary resolution on enhancing Icelandic as the official language of Iceland. This includes raising awareness about the Icelandic language, education and school activities and arts and culture and enhancing Icelandic language education at all school levels, as well as education and work development for teachers.

106. An action plan on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment for 2021–2025 was adopted in the spring of 2020; see also the response to question 5(b).

107. In the spring of 2019, a new sports policy was presented. It was developed in cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Sports Committee. The new policy includes a special emphasis on closer cooperation within the sports movement, the participation of young people with a native language other than Icelandic, and gender equality.

108. In the autumn of 2021, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture adopted a new policy on leisure and social activities for children and young people for 2030. It covers organised leisure activities.

109. A proposal for parliamentary resolution on an educational policy for 2030 was adopted by Althingi in the spring of 2021; see also the response to question 9(b). Additionally, in recent years, following a 2017 audit of the implementation of inclusive education in preschools, compulsory and secondary schools and a review of the allocation of funds to schooling for all, various measures have been taken to enhance the Icelandic educational system for everyone. Action has also been taken to increase teacher recruitment and raise the number of teachers, for professional development of teachers and school administrators and to increase the flow of knowledge between school levels.

110. A policy on strengthening the preschool stage is in the works, on the basis of a report submitted by a working group in the summer of 2021. The group made diverse proposals on how to enhance school activities at the preschool level, including on revising the national curriculum guide for preschools, the Regulation on the Preschool Work Environment, and the Building Regulation.

111. A parliamentary resolution on a gender equality action programme for 2020–2023 was adopted by Althingi in 2019. It includes various proposals on gender equality in connection with education and culture, sports and leisure activities.

112. A health policy for 2030 was adopted by Althingi in June 2019. Since then, a five-year action plan has been issued annually in order to reach the policy's objectives. The current action plan objectives include enhancing mental health care services in health care clinics and increasing access to general health care services by using distance health care solutions. The actions therefore concern both adults and children and include an extensive development of mental health care services in recent years.

113. A parliamentary resolution on public health policy for 2030 was adopted by Althingi in June 2021. Its emphases include clearing systemic obstacles that reduce people's chances to live a healthy life, and increasing education about health literacy within the education system. This policy therefore serves both children and adults. A five-year action plan is being prepared.

114. An action plan on services relating to reproduction was adopted by the Minister of Health in September 2021. Its objectives include giving necessary support to new families in their new roles. It also includes a special emphasis on ensuring access to counselling about sexual and reproductive health for primary school pupils.

115. An action plan on rehabilitative therapy for 2025 was set out by the Minister of Health in December 2020. Its objectives include having a specialised national child rehabilitation centre operational by the end of 2025.

116. A cancer programme was adopted by the Minister of Health in February 2019. Its objectives include offering personalised services for individuals with cancer and their families. The programme therefore concerns both children and adults, and the same applies to the five-year action plan on palliative care from March 2021, and the action plan on services for individuals with dementia from April 2020, both of which place a special emphasis on enhancing support for patients' families, children included.

117. An action plan on medical transport services and intensive care for 2025 was adopted by the Minister of Health in September 2021. Its objectives include increasing the use of distance health care solutions in the field for the benefit of all, children as well as adults.

118. In 2021, the Minister of Health presented a policy on digital solutions in health care for 2030. It includes an emphasis on individuals' active participation in their treatment, and on health promotion through education and information via Heilsuvera, an official website on health and its influencing factors. The policy therefore also concerns children, and an action plan based thereon is currently being prepared and financed.

119. Finally, it should be noted that in addition to the above, policies, action plans and other programmes that concern children indirectly have been set out, e.g. a policy on scientific research in healthcare for 2030. Additionally, a new policy and action plan on

mental health care services are being prepared on the basis of the aforementioned health and public health policies and are expected to be presented in 2022.

Reply to paragraph 15 (d) of the list of issues

Ratification of international obligations

120. The 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education was ratified by Iceland in 2021.

121. Ratification of the third Optional Protocol to the CRC is expected to take place before the end of 2023.

122. Ratification of the Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children is expected to take place before the end of 2023.

Part three

123. A compendium of the available requested information and statistics can be found in Annex I.

Conclusion

124. There has been a strong emphasis on children's rights in recent years. A new Ministry of Education and Children began its operations in the beginning of February 2022, reflecting the increased emphasis on matters concerning children and the coordination of services for them.

125. The Government Offices steering group on human rights met with the Youth Council for the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the spring of 2021 to seek its opinions on the principal challenges for human rights. That discussion showed a clear emphasis on the interplay of human rights and environment and climate matters and global challenges for the future that will have substantial effects on children. It is clear that the climate crisis will have wide-ranging effects on children's rights and on future generations and the Icelandic government will therefore place a special emphasis on these issues.
