



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Eighty-fifth session**

**Summary record of the 1990th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 22 May 2023, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Akizuki (Vice-Chair)

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*Ms. Akizuki (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention** *(continued)*

*Ninth periodic report of Iceland (continued)* ([CEDAW/C/ISL/9](#); [CEDAW/C/ISL/Q/9](#); [CEDAW/C/ISL/RQ/9](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iceland joined the meeting.*

*Articles 10–14*

2. **Ms. Xia** said that, according to the State party's report, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture was examining the reasons for women's withdrawal from scientific work and for the larger number of academic promotions accorded to men in the area of science. As the Ministry had reportedly completed a draft action plan to promote academic advancement from a gender and equality perspective in 2021, she would be interested in hearing about progress achieved in that regard.

3. She wished to know how the State party was encouraging higher education institutions to achieve the goal of increasing the proportion of female university professors from 33 per cent in 2021 to 36 per cent in 2027. She asked, for instance, whether there was budgetary support for that endeavour and how more women were encouraged to apply for decision-making positions in universities.

4. She was pleased to note that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture had taken steps to achieve gender parity among high-school students and to reduce gender-specific choices in education. She would appreciate further information on how women were encouraged to choose more non-traditional subjects, with a view to preventing the professional segregation of men and women in university education and diversifying their academic and career choices.

5. She was glad to see that the Directorate of Equality had produced a television series for young people that explored gender stereotypes and discrimination, and that teachers and career counsellors were encouraged to make use of the series in their work. She wished to know whether the approach had proved effective and whether the State party provided gender-sensitive teaching material and included modules on the elimination of gender stereotypes in teacher training courses.

6. Noting that the State party had no data on the educational progress of women and girls with disabilities, she wondered how they were guaranteed equal access to education and how their education was assessed.

7. **A representative of Iceland** said that, as noted in the report, the gender equality counsellor at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture reviewed all teaching material with a view to addressing gender equality concerns. The checklist for authors of educational material was regularly updated. Its purpose was to ensure that the material was free of all forms of prejudice regarding gender, disability, sexuality, class, religion or race. Individuals of both sexes should be equally portrayed in the curriculum, and boys and girls should not be presented solely in so-called traditional roles.

8. **A representative of Iceland** said that the proportion of female professors was monitored by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture with the aim of achieving the goal of 36 per cent by 2027. Among numerous other projects, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture had allocated a grant for a competition that was intended to promote interest in technology and engineering disciplines among girls in upper secondary schools.

9. **A representative of Iceland** said that the right to education was guaranteed for all persons, including persons with disabilities. The action plan on their behalf continued to be implemented and was being reviewed with the aim of further facilitating their access to higher education.

10. **A representative of Iceland** said that no action was currently undertaken to encourage women to apply for decision-making positions in universities. However, steps would be taken to incorporate that goal into existing strategies.
11. **Ms. Hlößversdóttir** (Iceland), replying to questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the decision to transfer the gender equality portfolio to the Prime Minister's Office had increased the domestic and international focus on gender equality and enhanced gender mainstreaming throughout the country's ministries and institutions.
12. The Convention had been mentioned in one judgment handed down in the District Court of Reykjavik.
13. With a view to improving the compilation of data on migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, two full-time positions had recently been established at Statistics Iceland.
14. In 2021 and 2022, 93 persons had changed their gender registration from male to female and 122 from female to male. In addition, 25 persons had changed their gender registration from male to gender-neutral and 112 from female to gender-neutral.
15. According to statistics from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the proportion of sexual violence cases that had led to prosecution had increased from 13 per cent in 2013 to 34 per cent in 2021.
16. **Ms. Haidar**, noting that the action group on equal pay and equality in the labour market was due to submit its proposal in 2023, said that she was aware that, by the end of August 2021, 64 per cent of companies and institutions had implemented the equal pay standards and received equal pay certification. However, the unemployment rate had begun to rise in 2019, and recent university graduates reportedly represented a high proportion of the unemployed: 32 per cent among women, compared to 20 per cent among men. In addition, 34 per cent of women still worked in part-time jobs, compared to 12 per cent of men. She therefore wished to know what measures the State party would take to increase the participation of women in permanent full-time labour.
17. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had expressed concern in 2021 that the unemployment rate among persons belonging to ethnic minorities or with migrant backgrounds in the State party remained at 7.4 per cent. According to the summary of stakeholders' submissions to the State party's universal periodic review in 2022, Iceland failed to protect migrant workers against systematic exploitation. Immigrants accounted for approximately 20 per cent of the workforce, and foreign workers were much more susceptible to exploitation by employers. She wished to know what measures had been taken to increase the number of women from ethnic minorities and with migrant backgrounds in the workforce, and to protect female migrant workers from exploitation. The Committee would be interested in hearing whether there was any complaint mechanism or legislative provision aimed at protecting migrant workers from exploitative employment conditions.
18. It was commendable that parental leave had been increased from nine to twelve months and was divided between the two parents, and that about 90 per cent of Icelandic fathers took paternity leave. Although the time gap between the expiry of parental leave and the start of preschool day care had thus been reduced, care for children during the gap was frequently assumed by mothers. She asked how the State party planned to bridge the gap and prevent women from being compelled either to withdraw from the labour market or to start working part-time. She would also be interested in hearing about the impact of the parental leave legislation on single mothers.
19. As there had been many reports of sexual harassment of women police officers, the Committee would like to know whether the State party had estimated the number of victims and perpetrators of sexual and gender-based harassment within the police force. It also wished to hear about the outcome of the 2022 survey to measure work culture and gender relations within the police.
20. Referring to self-identification under the Act on Gender Autonomy, she asked how the State party would compile the sex-disaggregated data that were required to measure progress in closing the pay gap and dealing with occupational segregation.

21. **A representative of Iceland** said that various steps had been taken to prevent bullying and sexual harassment in the police force. The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police had issued relevant guidelines, and corresponding rules had been implemented by the Reykjavik Metropolitan Police. A professional board composed of independent experts in fields related to gender equality issues had been established to handle cases concerning gender-specific and sexual harassment. However, it had handled only one case in 2014, two in 2017, one in 2019 and three in 2020. There were plans to produce a report later in the year, which would be conducive to a change in relevant policy.

22. **A representative of Iceland** said that immigrants accounted for 47 per cent of unemployed persons, and that 54 per cent of unemployed immigrants were male and 46 per cent were female. A strategy on immigrant and refugee affairs, which focused on the labour market, was currently being developed in cooperation with stakeholders and, it was hoped, with immigrants themselves. The Directorate of Labour helped unemployed immigrants to find work and informed them of their labour rights. It also ran a special programme for refugees, including refugee women, to provide them with enhanced support in finding jobs that were in line with their education and experience.

23. **A representative of Iceland** said that the municipalities offered financial support to bridge the gap between maternity or paternity leave and preschool day care. They also monitored private day-care facilities and provided basic training for the caregivers.

24. **A representative of Iceland** said that immigrant women could file complaints with the Equality Complaints Committee, which was an independent body. Discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnic origin was prohibited by two pieces of legislation enacted in 2018, and the Committee could issue rulings based on that legislation. A new provision on intersectionality or multiple discrimination made it easier for women of foreign origin, for instance, to file complaints with the Equality Complaints Committee.

25. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know what legal and policy-related measures the State party had taken to counter the disparities in access to health-care services for women and girls belonging to vulnerable groups, such as migrant women and women with disabilities, including access to contraceptives, prenatal tests and postnatal care, as well as to safe abortions and post-abortion care.

26. She would welcome information on a timeline for amending the Act on Sterilization Procedures with a view to criminalizing forced sterilization and guaranteeing the prior and informed consent of women with mental or physical disabilities. She asked how many sterilizations had been undertaken during the previous two years.

27. She wished to know what action the State party had taken to address the factors contributing to self-harm among girls and young women, and what steps it had taken or planned to take, including preventive measures and community initiatives, to address the high incidence of Alzheimer's disease and dementia among women.

28. She would appreciate information on the measures taken and additional guarantees offered by the State party to provide a safe environment and adequate health-care services for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons in hospitals and other medical environments, and on training courses for medical and health-care staff.

29. **A representative of Iceland** said that access to unbiased health care was guaranteed under the action programme on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex affairs (2022–2025). Under the Act on Gender Autonomy, the Landspítali (National University Hospital) Team on Gender Identity and Changes to Sex Characteristics was required to adopt rules of procedure in line with internationally recognized standards. The Ministry of Health funded the Hospital's Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Department, which cooperated with local family health-care teams, schools and child protection services. Another team at the Hospital, appointed in October 2022, provided services for children born with atypical gender characteristics. With a view to reducing waiting times, the Icelandic health authorities had recently concluded an agreement with Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Sweden to perform gender affirmation surgery.

30. **A representative of Iceland** said that it could be difficult for women with disabilities and women with addiction problems to access health-care services. The Minister of Health

had funded a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Róttin (The Root) that provided health-care services and support for homeless women, many of whom were victims of violence, for instance through prostitution, or suffered from substance abuse. Special educational material had been developed for health-care workers on people with disabilities, their rights and their specific health-care needs. Persons with disabilities were also entitled to a legal rights protector, who ensured that they fully understood the grounds for a surgical intervention, for instance, and could make an informed decision.

31. **A representative of Iceland** said that all women were entitled to receive counselling on the use of contraceptives and on the assistance available to them in connection with pregnancy and childbirth. Contraceptives could be obtained from the advisory services in clinics and hospitals. Information on such matters and on sexually transmitted diseases, in Icelandic and other languages, was also accessible on the Citizen Health Portal “Heilsuvera”. A project being implemented by the Ministry of Health was designed to promote mental health-care services on behalf of all groups, regardless of their gender or social status. The Ministry supported children’s mental health teams and mental health care at all levels of education. Another project promoted diverse treatment resources for alcohol and drug problems. A working group had submitted proposals for health-care services for young people with substance abuse problems, and an NGO had been provided with funds to implement two projects, one of which was for marginalized and homeless women.

32. **A representative of Iceland** said sterilization would be considered to be torture or assault and thus prohibited under the General Penal Code. The Government had appointed a steering committee to review the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and to propose legislative changes if necessary.

33. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know whether the State party had specific plans or programmes for supporting older women with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia.

34. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia**, said that the State party, despite having exceeded the 40 per cent threshold for women non-executive directors, was one of only two countries with no female chairpersons of corporations. Furthermore, women earned 14 per cent less than men in Iceland and their pensions were, on average, 13.2 per cent lower. In addition, more men were chairpersons of sports clubs, and pay gaps existed in national teams and local sports clubs, as well as in the film and music industries. She wished to know whether the State party had investigated the failure to appoint female chairpersons and to close the persistent pay gap in sports. She asked what strategies and reforms were envisaged to rectify the array of other remaining gaps.

35. Female citizens, migrant women, women with disabilities and other vulnerable groups of women were reportedly at greater risk of transport and energy poverty, and access to heating in the homes of vulnerable women remained challenging. She wished to hear about the State party’s plan to reform the social welfare benefit system with a view to mitigating the impact of cost-of-living increases on vulnerable categories of women. She also asked whether regulatory policy on corporate social responsibility made industrial energy users more protective of vulnerable groups, especially migrants, persons with disabilities and poor unemployed women.

36. She wondered whether the State party, with a view to building a more inclusive economic model and fiscal policy, had paid attention to gender-related outcomes of tax systems such as implicit and explicit bias, tax-setting codes, and the relative advantages of tax allowances versus tax credits.

37. **Ms. Reddock** said that owing to economic and social disparities, there was a high rate of female emigration from rural areas. She would therefore welcome information on gender inequality initiatives and efforts to improve social, psychological and other services for women, including single women and girls, in rural areas. She asked whether there were plans for more gender-informed regional development plans, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and plans to enhance the participation of rural women, women farmers, including sheep farmers, and fisherwomen in sustainable agriculture and food production. She wished to know whether the 2020 Climate Action Plan, which contained no reference to women or gender, would be updated in light of the Prime Minister’s

statement to the Commission on the Status of Women in 2022 on gender equality and empowerment in the Arctic.

38. She would welcome an update on the status of the Action Programme for Immigrants' Issues (2021–2024) and on measures taken on behalf of immigrant women and girls. She wished to know whether there was sufficient capacity for asylum-seeking girls and women, including single women, in reception centres, whether the asylum process had been streamlined and whether proper security conditions were guaranteed for families.

39. She asked whether the State party planned to introduce gender-sensitive, professional and advanced addiction treatment, including trauma-specific nursing care, for persons with serious addictions and to improve work and leisure activities in women's prisons. Lastly, she would appreciate information on plans to improve access to specialized State services for women and girls with disabilities, and on training programmes aimed at enhancing social care workers' and professionals' awareness of gender stereotypes and how they intersected with disability prejudices.

40. **A representative of Iceland** said that the 2020 State film policy contained provisions on improving women's participation in film-making and film studies. Parliament had adopted the first holistic legislation on music in May 2023. The new legislation reiterated the objective of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, namely that the diversity of all persons involved in music should be reflected in its implementation. Special importance was attached to gender equality in committees, councils and boards, as well as in decision-making.

41. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in recent years, annual grants of 40 million krónur (ISK) had been allocated to female entrepreneurs or their companies for projects managed by women and involving innovations. Women could apply for grants for the creation of business plans and for marketing, product development and labour costs, but grants were not allocated for production or start-up costs. The Icelandic Regional Development Institute provided loans of up to ISK 5 million without security and up to ISK 10 million with security for the operation of businesses in which women owned at least 75 per cent of the shares in rural communities. In recent years, between ISK 35 million and ISK 79 million had been allocated to, on average, 10 women each year. A Nordic study undertaken in 2019 had found that the pension gap was only 5 per cent and that Iceland was the leading country in that area. However, the Government planned to close the gap completely, primarily by adopting a range of measures focused on the root of the pension gap, namely the disparity in lifetime earnings.

42. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Ministry of Infrastructure had integrated gender considerations in policymaking in all areas under its competence and intended to incorporate them into the forthcoming national transportation plan, national housing plan and local government plans. A project called Air Bridge, which had been launched in 2022, offered rural residents lower airfares so that they could travel to Reykjavik. Rural women benefited greatly from the project.

43. The Government had introduced a project in 2016 aimed at improving access to the Internet in rural areas through fibre optics. An assessment conducted in 2021 had indicated that the benefits were in some cases greater for women, who were less likely to emigrate from rural areas and who could benefit from higher salaries, access to employment and shorter transportation times to work when better connected.

44. **A representative of Iceland** said that the income tax gender bias had been analysed. Recent reforms had reduced the incentive to use spousal tax brackets. All changes to the tax codes, like all changes to legislation, were subject to gender impact assessments.

45. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Directorate of Equality had carried out a study on employment and income opportunities for women in rural areas. The study was based on a survey in which interviewees had been asked to give their opinions on job opportunities, professional development and experiences of remote working or distance learning. In the light of the findings, recommendations had been made for the authorities to conduct a more detailed analysis of the impact of gender gaps in the rural labour market, to

formulate a strategy to standardize the use of technology in remote meetings in the public sector; and to increase the availability of facilities for remote workers.

46. A parliamentary resolution on an implementation plan for immigrants' issues 2022–2025 had recently been adopted by Althingi. Work had begun on putting the plan into effect, and progress would be reviewed by the end of 2023. Asylum-seekers arriving in Iceland, usually at Keflavík International Airport, which was the main point of entry, were informed of their rights and the assistance available to them. The Directorate of Labour, which oversaw the asylum process, had launched several projects to support vulnerable asylum-seekers, including women and girls. Nurses had been hired to improve the quality of health care in asylum centres. Asylum centres provided female residents with menstrual products free of charge.

47. In August 2022, the Government had begun work on the next version of the Action Plan on Disability. The process was taking some time, given the involvement of many subgroups and stakeholders.

48. **A representative of Iceland** said that the situation of female prisoners had improved since the opening of Hólmsheiði Prison in 2016. The new prison had a women's wing with a visiting area where prisoners could spend time with their children and families. A mental health team composed of psychologists, psychiatrists and nurses had been established, while additional work and leisure activities had been made available. A website had been set up to sell items made by prisoners.

49. The Government was conducting a review of the prison system that would take into account the conditions of detention of female prisoners. Emphasis had been placed on the training of prison guards and other staff. In 2023, prison staff had been invited to participate in a course on a trauma-informed approach to dealing with prisoners, considering that most female prisoners had a long history of trauma.

50. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in 2020, the Ministry of Health had published a national strategy on dementia, setting out a plan for services for persons with dementia. Parliament had reviewed and accepted a proposal on health-care services and actions for persons with dementia for the period 2023–2027.

51. **Ms. Mikko** said that the Act on Equal Pay Certification showed that eliminating the gender pay gap was both possible and necessary. She wondered how long it had taken the State party to draft and adopt the Act and whether the delegation could provide any data that would illustrate its impact.

52. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would be interested to know how the Government planned to address the lack of female leaders of sports clubs and associations and of female chairpersons of corporations. She wondered how the State party planned to tackle the feminization of energy poverty in the context of its renewable energy transition. She asked whether the Government had a regulatory policy on corporate social responsibility that ensured the protection of vulnerable groups.

53. **Ms. Reddock** said that she would particularly welcome information on measures to enhance rural women's involvement in sustainable agriculture and fisheries. She would be grateful for confirmation of whether the State party's Climate Action Plan would be evaluated from a gender perspective.

54. **A representative of Iceland** said that the provisions of the Act on Equal Pay Certification had not yet been fully realized. Four hundred and eighty-nine companies and institutions, with a total of 110,500 employees (75 per cent of the target), had implemented the equal pay standard and had received equal pay certification. The Government would evaluate the impact of the Act in the coming years.

55. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate had conducted research into the use and reuse of textiles and on recycling in the home and had published the findings. The Ministry planned to conduct further research on natural disasters and the effects of protective measures on security, well-being and equality.

56. The Government's policy on adaptation to climate change considered different scenarios in terms of the social impact of climate change and the links between climate

hazards, social justice and public health. The policy highlighted the need for groups of people vulnerable to climate change to be identified, consulted and supported, and it envisaged that adaptation measures should be designed in a way that ensured equitable outcomes. Gender was one of the core variables considered in the design and implementation of climate adaptation measures.

57. **A representative of Iceland** said that, according to the latest information, there were three female chairpersons of Icelandic corporations. The Government aimed to achieve gender parity among chairpersons of State-owned enterprises, as new boards were elected, by 2028.

58. **A representative of Iceland** said that measures to boost the rural economy and agriculture included the provision of substantial grants to farmers, which were not gender-targeted. Rural tourism had been growing rapidly, creating plentiful job opportunities. Many people living in the countryside now combined farming with the provision of tourism services, so that household incomes had diversified and increased. Jobs in the tourism sector also attracted young people and immigrants. The Government was currently implementing the regional development plan for the period 2018–2024 and had begun work on the subsequent iteration.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

59. **Mr. Safarov** said that, under article 7 of the Marriage Act (No. 31 of 14 April 1993), the Ministry of Justice might permit the marriage of persons younger than 18 years. He wished to know whether the law would be changed to set the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years for both sexes, without exception.

60. In cases of legal separation or divorce, article 51 of the Marriage Act provided that the duty to pay alimony would cease in the event of the beneficiary's remarriage or the death of either of the former spouses. He would be interested to know whether the same was true of the duty to pay child support. Moreover, he wondered what steps the Government was taking to prohibit the use of mediation in divorce proceedings that involved victims of domestic violence, and what legal support was provided to women with children during divorce proceedings in order to protect their property rights.

61. The Committee would be grateful for information on cases of early and child marriage among refugees and migrant families, and on the laws and procedures applicable in such cases. Lastly, he asked to what extent women and girls from refugee or migrant families living in Iceland enjoyed equal property rights.

62. **A representative of Iceland** said that in June 2022, Parliament had adopted a draft bill amending the Marriage Act. Amendments included repeal of the provision whereby persons younger than 18 years might be exempted from the minimum age requirement for entering marriage, and establishment of the principle that the Icelandic authorities would recognize marriages contracted abroad in accordance with the laws of the country in which the marriage had taken place. Furthermore, the amended Act allowed married couples to obtain a divorce without having to apply for legal separation, provided that they had no joint assets or children under the age of 18 years, or had entered into an agreement regarding custody of children, spousal maintenance and other divorce terms. The amended Act also proposed ways of ending a marriage on the grounds of domestic violence.

63. Despite the adoption of the bill, Parliament had discussed the need for a complete review of the laws and regulations on marriage, including the Marriage Act, in order to promote adequate protection for victims of domestic violence. The Ministry of Justice had therefore appointed a special committee to comprehensively review the Marriage Act and submit a new draft bill by late 2024.

64. **Ms. Hlöðversdóttir** (Iceland) said that in recent years, the world had witnessed a push-back against hard-won gains in gender equality and the reproductive rights of women and girls. It was therefore imperative that gender equality should remain on the public agenda and be considered at all levels of policymaking. The international community must fight to reverse negative trends and work to strengthen gender equality and human rights around the world. The Government of Iceland remained firmly committed to the promotion and

protection of the rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity, and would strive to find adequate solutions and responses to emerging challenges.

*The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.*