



**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 1989th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 22 May 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Akizuki (Vice-Chair)

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* No summary records were issued for the 1987th to 1988th meetings.

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

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Ninth periodic report of Iceland ([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.*
2. **Ms. Hlökkversdóttir** (Iceland), introducing her country's ninth periodic report ([CEDAW/C/ISL/9](#)), said that she was proud to note that Iceland had ranked first on the Global Gender Gap Index for 13 years in a row, being the only country to have closed more than 90 per cent of its gender gap. Although full gender equality had not yet been attained in Iceland, the Government believed that such equality was a prerequisite for a healthy society and therefore ensured that it was at the forefront of its decision-making.
3. In recent years, efforts to establish gender equality had been stepped up. Responsibility for policy in that area had been transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Prime Minister's Office in 2019 and a special new department, the Department of Equality, had been established. The Department coordinated the work of government agencies and played the leading role in developing law and policy on equal treatment and anti-discrimination. Using its special dashboards, the Department was able to monitor and follow up on all programmes related to gender equality. In line with the broadening of the scope of gender equality policy, the financial and human resources allocated to the area had been increased in recent years.
4. Althingi, the Icelandic Parliament had recently adopted a new law, the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, which included a provision related to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The Act enhanced the protection afforded to women in the most marginalized and vulnerable situations, including women of foreign descent, migrant women and women with disabilities. The adoption of another new law, the Act on the Administration of Matters Concerning Equality, had clarified legislation on gender equality and made it more complete.
5. In 2018, Parliament had adopted two laws on anti-discrimination: the Act on Equal Treatment in the Labour Market and the Act on Equal Treatment of Individuals Irrespective of Race and Ethnic Origin. The two Acts regulated the equal treatment of individuals inside and outside the labour market and addressed discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including racial or ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity.
6. Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights were vital aspects of gender equality. In 2019, Parliament had passed a new law on the termination of pregnancy, under which women and girls had the right to undergo a termination no later than the twenty-second week of pregnancy. In 2020, generous parental leave had been introduced: both parents had the right to take six months of parental leave each, with each parent being permitted to exchange only six weeks of leave with the other parent. Fathers' participation in daily childcare duties had steadily increased since they had gained an independent right to parental leave, leading to more equal distribution of childcare responsibilities and enhancing gender equality in the labour market.
7. Although the gender pay gap had decreased in recent years, it had not disappeared. The unadjusted wage gap had fallen from 20.5 per cent in 2008 to 12.6 per cent in 2020, while the adjusted wage gap had fallen from 6.4 per cent to 4.1 per cent over the same period. The current unadjusted pay gap was first and foremost a result of the gender-segregated labour market. Certain sectors were still dominated by women and had long been undervalued. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had highlighted the fact that care work was predominantly undertaken by women. Outside the context of the pandemic, Icelandic society and the economy remained heavily reliant on poorly paid work largely undertaken by women. To address that situation, the Government had appointed an action group to promote the realization of equal pay for work of equal value and to correct the

historical and systematic undervaluation of jobs traditionally considered to be the preserve of women.

8. In 2018, the Act on Equal Pay Certification had come into effect, requiring companies and institutions with more than 25 employees to undergo an audit to ensure that they offered equal pay for work of equal value. Almost all employers in the public sector and the majority of larger employers in the private sector had implemented the equal pay standard and acquired equal pay certification.

9. In recent years, three family justice centres for survivors of gender-based violence had been opened. Growing emphasis had been placed on preventing gender-based violence among future generations, strengthening the legal status of survivors and working with perpetrators in the manner prescribed by the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which Iceland had ratified in 2018. In 2020, Parliament had passed a resolution on protecting children and young people against sexual and gender-based violence and harassment. The resolution provided for a new, fully funded action plan for 2021–2025 that set out preventive measures to be incorporated into all levels of the education system.

10. In June 2022, the Code of Criminal Procedure had been amended to strengthen the legal status of survivors of sexual offences. A number of measures had been taken to improve the capacity and efficiency of the justice system in dealing with sexual offences and other acts of gender-based violence. In March 2023, a new action plan on handling sexual violence had been introduced, to enhance the efficiency and quality of investigations into sexual offences and the prosecutions brought against perpetrators.

11. Since 2006, a government-funded psychology clinic – Heimilisfriður – had provided specialized psychological treatment to perpetrators of intimate partner violence. The Government had recently funded the “Take the step” initiative to provide assistance to individuals who had committed, or felt that they might commit, an act of sexual violence, whether online or in person. Iceland was one of the leading stakeholders in the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence launched by the Generation Equality Forum.

12. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had tried to mitigate the adverse social effects of the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the disease. Preschool institutions, schools, youth centres and children’s sports clubs had remained open, as had services for victims of violence. A special task force had been established to coordinate actions taken to combat violence, particularly that directed at women, children and other groups in vulnerable situations, and a significant amount of funding had been allocated to women’s shelters.

13. In June 2022, the Prime Minister had appointed a governmental working group responsible for determining whether the Government should introduce a comprehensive plan of coordinated action against hate speech. The working group had completed its task in December 2022. In February 2023, after consulting with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), experts and other stakeholders, the Prime Minister had submitted a proposal for a parliamentary resolution on government actions to tackle hate speech. The proposal was currently being discussed in Parliament.

14. In recent years, the Government had made important strides in protecting and advancing the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons. Iceland had recently attained fifth place on the Rainbow Europe Map and first place on the Trans Rights Map. That progress had been the result of extensive work. In 2019, Parliament had passed the Act on Gender Autonomy, which ensured the right of all persons aged 18 years and older (and subsequently 15 years and older, following the amendments made in 2020) to change the official record of their gender by undergoing a self-identification process that did not require them to have any surgical operations, medication, hormonal treatments or therapy. Individuals could also register as gender-neutral. In 2022, Parliament had adopted the Prime Minister’s resolution on an LGBTIQ+ action programme for 2022 to 2025.

15. Numerous projects on gender equality were being developed by ministries, institutions and organizations. For instance, the Government was working on a new gender equality action programme for 2024 to 2027 whose purpose would be to eliminate multiple

and intersecting forms of discrimination. The Government had decided to carry out a special survey of unpaid domestic and care work, in order to better understand how such work was distributed between men and women in households. The results of the survey would be used to promote gender mainstreaming in laws and policies.

Articles 1–6

16. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know whether the State party would consider directly incorporating the Convention and the Optional Protocol into national law. He wondered whether it would consider increasing the visibility of the Convention and the Optional Protocol by printing and distributing copies of them, publishing them online, including them in educational curricula and ensuring that they were cited in court decisions. He would appreciate information on the budget allocated to measures to protect women's rights in the previous five years. It would be interesting to know whether the State party would consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and, if so, whether it would be incorporated into national law.

17. The Committee would be interested to know how often the Convention and the Optional Protocol had been cited in court decisions concerning the rights of women and girls. He would welcome information on the implementation of legal provisions prohibiting discrimination, particularly on grounds of gender, such as article 65 of the Constitution, and details of court decisions related to gender-based discrimination. The State party might explain why it had not ratified more of the optional protocols relating to inquiries and communication procedures established by the United Nations treaty bodies. He was curious to know why no NGOs appeared to have participated in the preparation of the State party's periodic report and why no representatives of NGOs were taking part in the constructive dialogue. It would be interesting to hear about any measures being taken to address horizontal and vertical gender segregation.

18. **A representative of Iceland** said that the ninth periodic report had been published on a government web page in English and Icelandic and on the Prime Minister's website. The Committee's concluding observations on the ninth periodic report would be translated into Icelandic and published on the web page. A new gender equality action programme for 2024–2027 would set out measures for raising awareness of the Convention and the Committee's concluding observations among State authorities, stakeholders and the general public.

19. The Convention was covered in the curricula of law courses and in training courses for police officers. In 2021, members of the prosecution services and the police had attended training courses on trafficking in persons, domestic violence and the plausibility of witness statements in cases related to sexual violence. The Judicial Administration had held a course on digital violence and sexual privacy that 24 judges and their assistants had attended in October 2022. In 2023 and 2024, it would be holding seminars on the amendments made to article 194 of the General Penal Code, which concerned the offence of rape. Between 2021 and 2023, the Icelandic Women's Rights Association had been allocated 10 million Icelandic krónur (ISK) of government funds to organize courses and distribute information on gender equality in Iceland and abroad.

20. The Convention was referenced in the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, which was taught in university law departments. Courses on various aspects of that Act were taught to students at the Institute of Public Administration and Politics, which organized online courses for employers on how they might respond to the #MeToo movement. Presentations on the Act had been delivered to trade unions, the Directorate of Equality and the Department of Equality of the Prime Minister's Office.

21. The Government generally aligned national law with international instruments, rather than incorporating those instruments directly into its internal legal order. As far back as 1984, the committee responsible for drafting national laws had noted that account should be taken of the Convention, which had been signed by Iceland in 1980 and ratified in 1985. Since then, United Nations treaties and recommendations had served as the basis for laws and policies on gender equality and plans for the implementation of gender equality.

22. Articles 13 and 16 of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender were based on the Convention and could be cited as examples of how the Convention was

implemented into national law through the development of legislation. Other articles of the Act, including articles 6 to 10 and 18, were also based on the Convention. The Convention had also been implemented through government programmes, cooperation agreements and grants allocated to women's rights organizations.

23. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in recent years, the Government had made legislative amendments, issued parliamentary resolutions, launched fully funded action plans and conducted awareness-raising campaigns to combat gender-based violence. Under the amended article 194 of the General Penal Code, rape was considered to have been committed whenever consent had not been freely expressed. Digital sexual violence was now punishable under article 199 (a) of the General Penal Code. Two new provisions – article 218 (b) on domestic violence and article 232 on stalking – had been added to the General Penal Code to increase protection for victims of psychological violence. Article 218 (b) provided for the protection of children against domestic violence, irrespective of whether that violence was directed at them. Its enactment had made it easier to measure occurrences of domestic violence and would facilitate its prevention. Under article 232, repeatedly following, monitoring, contacting or stalking another person in such a way as to instil fear or anxiety in him or her was a punishable offence.

24. In June 2022, Parliament had adopted a bill governing the treatment of cases of stalking in the justice system. Provisions had been included to strengthen the protection of victims of stalking, to simplify the procedure for issuing restraining orders, and to improve the legal status of victims of crimes in criminal proceedings. Other changes gave victims greater access to general documentation relating to alleged perpetrators, allowed them to be present when cases were heard, and entitled them and their legal representatives to make statements and ask concise questions in court. Victims were now able to file claims for compensation even when the accused was acquitted by a court.

25. The Government had recently adopted an action plan addressing the way in which sexual offences were handled by the police and prosecution services, thus resulting in a strengthening of those services throughout the country. It had also improved the training of police officers in the handling of such offences.

26. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Government placed great emphasis on its cooperation with NGOs and had consulted with them regularly during and after the drafting of the periodic report, inter alia by means of the Government's consultation portal. Comments had been received from the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, the Icelandic Human Rights Centre, the City of Reykjavik and the National Association of People with Intellectual Disabilities. A meeting had been held with NGOs in late 2021 to explain the procedure for submission of a shadow report.

27. **A representative of Iceland** said that budgeted financial contributions for the gender equality policy area had increased by between 8 and 11 per cent per year since the submission of the previous periodic report, and that additionally there had been increases in certain operating costs and payments for experts working on specific projects within government ministries. The Directorate of Equality employed five women and three men, and its budget had amounted to over ISK 141 million in 2022. Each of the country's 12 government ministries had a gender equality representative. The number of staff in the Department of Equality had increased from four to seven since 2019, when the gender equality policy area had been transferred to the Prime Minister's Office. Government bodies had entered into numerous cooperation agreements with civil society organizations working on human rights and gender equality and had allocated some ISK 290 million in 2020 to programmes for survivors of violence and to the operation of shelters.

28. **A representative of Iceland** said the country's legal system was dualistic. Domestic law must be brought into line prior to accession or ratification. It thus took a relatively long time for the State to accede to international instruments, including optional protocols.

29. **A representative of Iceland** said that under amendments introduced into the General Penal Code in 2022, any person convicted of discrimination by means of a denial of goods or services or a refusal to provide services on numerous grounds, including ethnic or national identity or gender identity, was subject to a fine or imprisonment of up to 6 months.

30. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would like to know whether the State party had considered the consequences of the recent adoption of the Act on Gender Autonomy. It would be of interest to find out whether it would have an impact on the situation in safe spaces reserved for females only, such as shelters, prisons and bathroom facilities, on sports or on the collection of data, for example on the gender pay gap. Did the legal provisions refer to pregnant women or pregnant persons?

31. **A representative of Iceland** said that, under the new legislation, transgender women had the same rights as women when it came to access to safe spaces. The law had been adopted only recently, but the authorities had received no complaints about that policy. The Prison and Probation Administration decided where sentences were served on the basis of a number of criteria, including, since 2019, the prisoner's gender identity. There too, no complaints had been filed. The legal term used for persons who were pregnant had been amended to read "women and others capable of carrying a child and giving birth". After the enactment of the Act on Gender Autonomy in 2019, the population registry had begun accepting three possibilities for gender: male, female or a neutral registration status. All groups were covered by the legislation banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity, and the laws and regulations generally designed on the basis of equal representation of men and women had remained unchanged. Since 2019, when the Act on Gender Autonomy had entered into effect, over 500 persons had officially changed their gender registration. In the five years prior to that, just 86 had done so.

32. **Ms. Rana** said that the Committee would like to know when the national human rights institution would be established, what role the Human Rights Centre would play after its creation, and how the authorities would ensure that the establishment of the new institution would take place in an open and transparent manner, with consultation of women's rights organizations. In the light of the heavy workload and extremely broad mandate of the Directorate of Equality under the Prime Minister's Office, she would like to know whether the Government was considering providing the Directorate with more resources and transforming it into a government ministry. It would be of interest to find out how many regional branches the Directorate had opened in the past five years.

33. Noting that the third national action plan for implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security had covered the period ending in 2022, she would like to know if the Government planned to adopt a fourth national action plan, and if so, with what focus. The Committee would also be interested in hearing about the State party's assessment of the third national action plan.

34. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that Iceland had consistently supported representation of women in decision-making roles, sometimes with the use of temporary special measures, such as encouragement of the use of quotas by political parties. There had also been a legal provision calling for at least 40 per cent female representation on the boards of directors of companies with over 50 employees. She would like to know whether the Government would consider mandating gender quotas in elections, in particular to guard against a backlash against female participation. The Committee would like to find out the number of people with gender-neutral registration who held positions in politics or on government committees, councils and boards in the public sector. It would be useful to know if any temporary special measures were under consideration to increase the number of women holding positions of responsibility in the media, the judiciary or law enforcement, for example, and whether any specific measures were being considered to change the culture in the police force. She would also like to receive information on any specific temporary special measures adopted in the context of efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

35. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Government's coalition agreement called for the establishment of a national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). In January 2023, the Prime Minister's Office had issued a Green Paper on assessment of the status of human rights in Iceland. Emphasis had been placed on broad consultation with stakeholders and the public in all parts of the country, and experts had held meetings with NGOs and human rights institutions. A bill for the establishment of an independent national human rights institution was being drafted and would be submitted for adoption in late 2023. The Green Paper would also serve as a basis for elaborating a national

plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights, whose adoption was scheduled for late 2023, as called for in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

36. The financial contribution of the Ministry of Justice to the Human Rights Centre had doubled in 2019. Pending the formal establishment of the national human rights institution, the Centre played an important role in supporting human rights research, education and monitoring activities. The Department of Equality and the Directorate of Equality were responsible for ensuring proper implementation of the relevant legislation on gender equality and for combating gender-based violence and sexual harassment. The Directorate was located in Akureyri, a town in the north of Iceland, and was active throughout the country.

37. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in 2022, a comprehensive evaluation had been conducted of the third national action plan on women and peace and security; its findings were being used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to draw up a fourth national action plan. The assessment had found that there was room for improvement in various aspects of education and advocacy within certain government ministries. All staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received training on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

38. While Iceland did not take part in military peacekeeping actions, it often seconded civilian experts with a focus on holistic aspects of gender mainstreaming and decision-making to United Nations agencies active in conflict areas. The Nordic Women Mediators Network focused on supporting women from certain conflict-affected areas, such as Afghanistan or the Syrian Arab Republic. Iceland also funded a position devoted to the women and peace and security agenda at the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels.

39. **A representative of Iceland** said that the number of women in the police force was increasing and 4 of the 10 police commissioners were women. The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police was developing an implementation plan for equality and law enforcement, as well as indicators on equality for police commissioners. Sexual harassment in the workplace was another area of focus; a survey of work culture and gender relations within the police was under way and would form the basis of a report and recommendations to be issued later in 2023.

40. **A representative of Iceland** said that it was not considered necessary to introduce quotas for political representation as 48 per cent of parliamentarians and 51 per cent of municipal representatives were women. Data had been collected on the number of women on company management boards, with a view to assessing the gender balance of those boards and considering whether improvements were needed.

41. **A representative of Iceland** said that temporary special measures were permitted by both the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender and the 2018 anti-discrimination laws, if there were valid reasons for such measures. Special considerations related to pregnancy and childbirth were not considered discrimination. Job advertisements could only state a gender preference in the interests of promoting more equal representation of women and men in an occupational sector or if there were valid reasons for only advertising for a person of a specific gender. The Directorate of Equality could provide comments and propose temporary special measures for gender equality to ministries and other authorities. No data were available on the number of public board or committee members with gender-neutral registration, but a recent legislative amendment had stipulated that the proportion of women must never be less than 40 per cent and that an equal proportion of women and men must not prevent the nomination and appointment of gender-neutral persons. Examples of special measures for gender equality included the Women's Loan Guarantee Fund and the measures set out under the Parliamentary Resolution on a Gender Equality Action Programme, which were intended to increase the representation of women in the police force and the representation of men among trainee teachers.

42. Particular emphasis had been placed on gender equality in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the social effects of quarantine had been minimized through the continued operation of domestic violence shelters and of preschool and school settings for younger children. The economic measures implemented during the pandemic had been subjected to

gender impact assessment prior to implementation, and gender impact had been highlighted in reports published by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.

43. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would like to know whether affirmative action for women included trans women, and if so, why that was the case. A breakdown of the number of registrations of trans women and trans men would be appreciated.

44. **A representative of Iceland** said that quotas for women would apply to any trans woman who was registered as a woman.

45. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that, in the light of the persistently high rates of violence against women in the State party, she would like to know whether there were plans to introduce a stand-alone law on gender-based violence. With reference to the nine cases of sexual assault and domestic violence that had been filed with the European Court of Human Rights, she would appreciate more information on the judgments of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court on domestic violence cases. Details of the efforts made to address online violence against women, including use of the tools available under the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, would be appreciated. More details would also be welcome of the process of constitutional reform, in particular with reference to plans to prohibit discrimination against genotypes – distinctive human characteristics and capacities that were genetically determined. Given the presence in the State party’s historical canon of women who defied stereotypes, she wished to know how that historical narrative of strong women was continued.

46. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she wished to know whether any of the cases of trafficking in persons mentioned in the periodic report and the replies to the list of issues had led to convictions under the amended General Penal Code; whether a new national action plan on trafficking in persons had been adopted; what measures had been taken to collect and analyse data from all sources; whether a non-punishment clause for victims of trafficking in persons would be added to the General Penal Code; and whether the national referral mechanism for victims had been evaluated.

47. She asked whether any measures were planned to remedy the lack of formal procedures for identification and referral of child victims of trafficking in persons; whether the measures described in the State party’s replies to the list of issues had been implemented, and if so, what their effect had been; and whether the regulations on au pairs had been revised. Most foreign victims of trafficking in persons opted to leave the State party, rather than cooperate with investigations into their trafficking. She therefore wished to know whether police officers and victims of trafficking were aware of the right to a reflection period, and the possibility of a period of residency, and whether any data existed on the use of the reflection period.

48. It would be helpful to understand why persons who had been prosecuted for the purchasing of sexual services retained their anonymity; whether court hearings on such matters were public, and if not, how such hearings conformed to article 6 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; and how the law prevented the buying of sexual services.

49. **A representative of Iceland** said that her country took pride in its strong women leaders, including the Prime Minister and other Cabinet ministers, and literature was one way in which the rights of women and girls were promoted. Although her Government’s presidency of the Council of Europe had included a focus on violence against women and girls and online violence, there remained room for improvement at national level, particularly given the increase in online abuse during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

50. **A representative of Iceland** said that the adoption of amendments to legislation and an action plan on sexual offences were part of efforts to tackle the increase in gender-based violence through the justice system. Although a stand-alone law on gender-based violence had not been considered, domestic, sexual and online violence had been addressed through legislative reforms. Concerning the nine cases of sexual assault and domestic violence before the European Court of Human Rights, consideration would be given to the judgments handed down by the Court. In the meantime, reforms were being implemented based on the findings of the evaluation reports by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human

Beings of the Council of Europe and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

51. Her Government had signed and ratified the Convention on Cybercrime and, in January 2023, the first Additional Protocol thereto; the second Additional Protocol had also been signed and its implementation in law was under consideration. The provisions of the Convention on Cybercrime had been used to initiate mutual legal assistance with other States and to address sexual violence on online platforms.

52. The aims of amendments to the General Penal Code concerning trafficking in persons were to increase the judicial protection of victims of trafficking, especially women and children of foreign origin, and make it easier to prosecute for the offence of trafficking in persons. The courts had heard one case under the amended legislation, which had not led to a conviction owing to a lack of proof.

53. **A representative of Iceland** said that grants had been used to fund different means of reaching migrant women, including in the workplace and through social networks, in order to inform them of their rights and the support available to them. To the same end, the asylum system made provision for the separate interviewing of women who were seeking asylum as part of a couple. A high percentage of women seeking asylum were granted refugee status and thus entered the labour market. The measures taken had led to refugee women seeking help and information at reception centres for domestic violence, sexual abuse and labour-market issues.

54. The funding for family justice centres to operate a national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in persons had been extended several times, and it was expected that the funding would be renewed again on expiry of the current contract. The mechanism coordinated the work and response of all relevant agencies, including the police, social services and the Directorate of Immigration. Most persons who were applicable for a reflection period as victims of trafficking in persons were also applying for asylum, which offered stronger support and protection.

55. **A representative of Iceland** said that the increase in domestic and gender-based violence was attributed in part to improved recording of incidents and to the confidence of survivors of abuse in the justice system. The Ministry of Justice had proposed amendments to the Act on Foreigners to address the situation of au pairs and had suggested increased oversight of them. The Directorate of Immigration had established operating procedures for officials in the event of a suspected case of trafficking in persons, which – in the case of child victims – included ensuring the best interests of the child and informing child protection services of the situation. Persons who had been convicted of purchasing sexual services usually accepted their conviction and were required to pay a fine. The low level of that fine meant that such perpetrators were covered by the general administrative rules on anonymity.

56. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in 2023, the Prime Minister had commissioned experts to compile a report on the human rights section of the Constitution, which would take into account the constitutional work carried out since 2005, including the work on genotypes. An action plan on child protection for the period 2023–2027 was under development; it would address the issue of child victims of trafficking in persons through the reform of procedures, consultation with the National Agency for Children and Families, and the development of educational material and tools for those working in child protection.

57. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis**, noting that there was no specific reference in law to violence against women with disabilities, said that she would appreciate information on whether domestic violence shelters were accessible to women with disabilities. She asked whether any further studies were planned to explore the idea that women's leadership triggered a backlash and was a factor in violence against women.

58. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would appreciate further clarification of the situation of victims of trafficking in persons who did not make use of the reflection period, in particular those who subsequently left the State party. She wondered whether the fine for purchasing sexual services should be increased in order to remove perpetrators' anonymity.

59. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to receive information on the criminalization of female genital mutilation and efforts to prevent forms of violence that were more commonly

found in immigrant communities, including honour-based violence. Were any data available on those forms of violence?

60. **A representative of Iceland** said that a national action plan for persons with disabilities was in development and would focus on access to support for women with disabilities, including in relation to violence. Only the shelter in Reykjavík was fully accessible; in the northern and southern parts of the country, off-site venues and adapted hotel rooms were used to provide accommodation and access to counselling where necessary.

61. The asylum process led to a longer residence permit than the reflection period available to victims of trafficking in persons, which explained why a number of victims opted to apply for asylum. The asylum system also provided greater support, as it was a relatively large and well-organized operation.

62. **A representative of Iceland** said that the law had been amended to make it easier to prosecute cases of trafficking in persons. The one case that had been brought before the courts to date was the first brought under the amended law, and other cases were under investigation. The National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police was considering the establishment of an advisory group on trafficking in persons, to support police departments across the country. Female genital mutilation was criminalized in article 218 (a) of the General Penal Code.

63. **A representative of Iceland** said that a new article in the Gender Equality Act introduced the concept of intersectionality in domestic legislation and made it easier to address multiple discrimination.

Articles 7–9

64. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she wished know how the State party planned to encourage the election of more diverse women at the local level; what efforts had been made to balance typically gendered roles within municipal government, such as the overrepresentation of men in planning committees; and how the number of female judges would be increased. She would appreciate receiving data on the number of women with disabilities and of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons represented in local and national government bodies and on the boards of publicly listed companies. She wondered what measures had been taken to ensure the representation of minority women in leadership positions. The delegation might explain how hate speech was regulated in public life; how women's rights were promoted and protected in parliament; and how the representation of women in the diplomatic service was being increased. She asked whether up-to-date statistics were available on the number of women deployed as part of the efforts of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Had any measures been taken to increase women's and girls' participation in sports and to reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment in sport?

65. **Mr. Safarov** said that it would be helpful to know how the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness had been incorporated in national legislation and implemented, and whether different legal definitions of refugee status had been compared as part of that process. Information would be appreciated on the obstacles to ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and on the access of women with children to the family reunification process.

66. **A representative of Iceland** said that the low number of embassies and permanent missions abroad was reflected in the low numbers of ambassadors posted overseas; however, half of the directors general at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – who were senior staff members – were women and women comprised 37 per cent of ambassadors in 2023. The Permanent Delegation of Iceland to NATO comprised an equal number of men and women, although the current ambassador was male. In terms of women and peace and security, women represented Iceland at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The focus in general was on facilitating access to the negotiating table for women of foreign descent; as a small State with no military forces, Iceland was not always best placed to engage in areas of active conflict.

67. **A representative of Iceland** said that a campaign launched during the local elections in early 2022 had been aimed at increasing diversity among electoral candidates. Campaign material had been published in Icelandic, English and Polish. The regional development plan

for the period 2022–2026 included action to encourage local government to reflect the diversity of society. Efforts would be made to adapt working conditions in local governments to people’s diverse situations and provide a better work–life balance.

68. The Directorate of Equality was cooperating with the National Olympic and Sports Association to map gender dynamics in sport and identify power structures, with a view to determining whether changes were needed. In 2023, the National Football Association had set up a working group on gender equality that would include high-level representatives from across the sport and a representative from the Prime Minister’s Office.

69. **A representative of Iceland** said that 46 per cent of all judges were women and the Supreme Court had its highest ever ratio of women justices. The right of stateless persons to international protection was guaranteed under article 39 of the Foreign Nationals Act through a direct reference to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

70. **A representative of Iceland** said that the system for family reunification of refugees was applicable to all refugees. The Icelandic Red Cross received State support to provide vulnerable applicants with assistance in exercising the right to family reunification, and financial support was available for the first two years following the grant of international protection. The application process was overseen by the Directorate of Immigration, with forms available in Icelandic and English, while the Directorate of Labour, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, was responsible for the transfer to Iceland of family members. Online interpretation was used to overcome language barriers during that process.

71. **A representative of Iceland** said that awareness-raising and media literacy measures had been taken to tackle online hate speech and harassment. The Icelandic Safer Internet Centre sought to improve knowledge of the safe and positive use of the Internet among children, parents and teachers. The Parliamentary Resolution on Measures Against Violence and its Consequences 2019–2022 included work to raise awareness of hate speech and eliminate it from public debate. Other efforts included the funding by the Office of the Prime Minister of a theatre show and television programme on hate speech. The action programme on LGBTI affairs 2022–2025 also included action to combat hate speech. In 2022, a working group had been set up to tackle the issue of hate speech. Following broad public consultations, the working group had presented a proposal for a parliamentary resolution on combating hate speech that would include a number of actions for different departments. Article 27 of the Media Act prohibited the encouragement of criminality or incitement of hatred on a number of grounds, including gender. A bill on amendments to the Media Act to incorporate the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of the European Union included amendments to article 27 that would enhance the protection of vulnerable groups and address hatred on the basis of gender and other factors.

72. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Directorate of Equality was working with Statistics Iceland, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities to develop equality indicators for municipalities, with the aim of collecting and publishing information on gender and diversity in each municipality. The Gender Equality Action Programme sought to ensure the operation of the Sports and Youth Activities Communication Counsellor as a full-time role.

73. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would appreciate clarification of whether the State party continued to employ a Special Envoy for Gender Equality and whether that was a full-time position.

74. **A representative of Iceland** said that the title of that position had been changed to be more inclusive and the role was now entitled the Ambassador on Human Rights. The current ambassador was a woman who was based in Iceland.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.