

ICELAND 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Iceland is a constitutional parliamentary republic. The president is the head of state, and a prime minister, usually the leader of the largest party, is head of government. There is a unicameral parliament (Althingi). On June 25, voters elected Gudni Thorlacius Johannesson president in a free and fair election. Free and fair parliamentary elections took place on October 29. Negotiations to form a new government continued at year's end.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most significant human rights problem during the year was discrimination against foreigners, most significantly asylum seekers. There were discrepancies in access to the health-care system and employment for asylum seekers who did not enter the country under international auspices. Employers discriminated against non-native Icelanders, who were also vulnerable to trafficking. Workers without Icelandic-language skills faced an increased risk of occupational accidents. There was violence against women and children, and women faced a heavy burden of proof in rape cases.

Other human rights problems included holding pretrial detainees sometimes with convicted prisoners. In the legal system, defendants who availed themselves of public defenders and were found guilty had to reimburse the government for the lawyer's services. Courts may also allow illegally obtained evidence. There were trafficking in persons, employment discrimination against women, occasional discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment and access to public places, and underpayment of wages to young persons.

There were no reports of officials committing violations in the security forces or elsewhere in the government.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Physical Conditions: Authorities incarcerated female and male inmates in the Akureyri and the new Reykjavik prisons. Authorities closely monitored men held in facilities with women, and, with their mutual consent, men interacted with women only in the common areas and did not share cellblocks. The law states the government must accommodate juvenile offenders in establishments managed by the Government Agency for Child Protection unless there are special grounds for accommodating them in prison. Authorities held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners.

Although overcrowding was generally not a problem, when it occurred in the prisons, authorities held pretrial detainees in jails in local police stations. As of December 5, there was a waiting list of approximately 550 persons convicted of crimes but unable to serve their sentences in prisons due to a lack of prison space. During the year there were no deaths in the country's prisons and jails.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring of prison conditions by independent local and international human rights groups, the media, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and international bodies, but no such visits occurred during the year.

Improvements: In November the government opened a new prison on the outskirts of Reykjavik, which has a capacity of 56 prisoners, both men and women (separately). The new prison, which has a pretrial detention block, replaced a detention facility in Kopavogur that closed in 2015, a pretrial detention facility in

Reykjavik that closed during the year, and the pretrial detention block of the Litla-Hraun prison.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police maintain internal security. In addition the Icelandic Coast Guard (ICG) carries out general law-enforcement duties at sea. The national police, the nine regional police forces, and the ICG all fall under the purview of the Ministry of the Interior.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police and the ICG, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. While there were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted in a 2012 report there was no mechanism independent of the police and prosecution authorities for the investigation of allegations of police misconduct. In June parliament provided such an independent supervisory commission from January 1, 2017.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police may make arrests in a number of circumstances, such as when they believe a prosecutable offense has been committed, when they see a need to prevent further offenses or destruction of evidence, when they need to protect a suspect, or when a person refuses to obey police orders to move. The law explicitly requires warrants only for arresting individuals who fail to appear at court for a hearing or a trial, or at a prison to serve a sentence.

Authorities must promptly inform a person under arrest of his rights and bring him before a judge within 24 hours of arrest, and this right was respected. There is no functioning bail system. The judge determines whether a suspect must remain in custody during the investigation. The judge may grant conditional release, subject to assurances that the accused will appear for trial. Upon arrival at the police station, the law entitles detainees to legal counsel, which the government provides

for the indigent. There were no reports that suspects were detained incommunicado or held under house arrest.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: Arrested or detained persons are entitled to challenge in court the legal basis of their detention. If found to have been unlawfully detained, they may obtain release and compensation. A person may also appeal adverse decisions to the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Defendants are presumed innocent. Authorities must inform them of the charges against them promptly and in detail. Noncitizens have a right to free interpretation as necessary from the moment charged through all appeals. Trials are fair and take place without undue delay. They are generally public, but judges may close them at the defendant's request or when minors are involved. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial, and they have access to legal counsel of their own choosing. The government covers attorneys' fees of defendants unable to pay, but the law requires defendants found guilty to reimburse the government. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, and they and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. Defendants can confront the prosecution or plaintiff witnesses and present their own witnesses and evidence. At the discretion of the courts, prosecutors may introduce evidence that police obtained illegally. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have the right to appeal, and the Supreme Court handles appeals expeditiously. These rights extend to all defendants without prejudice.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals may seek damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation through domestic courts. They can appeal decisions involving alleged violations by the government of the European Convention on Human Rights to the ECHR. Administrative remedies are also available for alleged wrongs.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Immigration law allows authorities to conduct house searches without a prior court order when there is a significant risk that delay would jeopardize an investigation of immigration fraud. Immigration law also allows authorities to request DNA tests without court supervision in cases of suspected immigration fraud. Through September 22, authorities requested one DNA test.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and press.

Freedom of Speech and Expression: The law establishes fines and imprisonment for up to two years for “[a]nyone who publicly mocks, defames, denigrates or threatens a person or group of persons by comments or expressions of another nature, for example by means of pictures or symbols for their nationality, color, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, or disseminates such materials.” During the year the Metropolitan Police indicted eight individuals for hate speech against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons and two for hate speech against individuals on the basis of their religion. By year’s end the courts had not ruled on the cases.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. According to Statistics Iceland, 97 percent of households had internet access and 99 percent of citizens used the internet in 2014.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern.

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has an established system for providing protection to refugees. It allows for accelerated refusal by the Directorate of Immigration of applications deemed to be “manifestly unfounded.” An independent regulatory committee, the Immigration and Asylum Appeals Board, adjudicated asylum cases rejected by the directorate.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country adheres to the EU's Dublin III regulation, which allows for the return of asylum seekers to the country of entry into the EU. The country did not return asylum seekers to EU member states Greece and Hungary unless they already received protection in these countries. In addition, the country did not return vulnerable asylum seekers to Italy.

Employment: Asylum seekers needed to have guaranteed housing in order for authorities to issue work permits. Some asylum seekers who had found a job, signed a job contract, and applied for a job permit had to wait up to four months to receive the permit, resulting in missed job opportunities.

Access to Basic Services: All asylum seekers had access to the health-care system as part of a package of benefits when living in housing provided by the Directorate of Immigration.

To be fully enrolled in the public health care system, there is a six-month waiting period (from the day they register their legal domicile in the country) for asylum seekers with the means and desire to provide their own housing or who have entered the job market during that time. These individuals are responsible for purchasing health insurance during the six-month waiting period. Critics argued that access to the health-care system should be extended on arrival to any asylum seeker who opts to live outside of the Directorate of Immigration's facilities or who starts work during that six-month period.

Some asylum seekers who were not issued a national identification number experienced delays in receiving necessary health services.

An increase in asylum applications during the year made it difficult for the Directorate of Immigration to guarantee adequate housing for all asylum applicants.

Durable Solutions: During the year the country received 56 Syrian refugees for permanent resettlement through UNHCR.

Temporary Protection: As of August 31, the government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees and provided subsidiary protection to 23 persons and humanitarian protection to two others.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On October 29, the country held parliamentary elections that were considered free and fair. On June 25, voters elected a new president in elections that were also considered free and fair.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit the participation of women and members of minorities in the political process, and they participated.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were no reports of government corruption during the year.

Financial Disclosure: Most public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws. The law requires members of parliament and government ministers who are not members of parliament to report their financial interests publicly on parliament's website and to update this information within one month of receiving new information. As of December 1, six new members of parliament elected in the October 29 elections reported their financial interests. There are no criminal or administrative sanctions for noncompliance.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for public access to government information, and the government provided effective access for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The parliament's ombudsman, elected by parliament for a period of four years, secures the rights of the citizens to equal and impartial treatment in their dealings with public authorities. The ombudsman is independent from any orders, including from parliament, when exercising his functions. Individuals can lodge complaints with the ombudsman about the decisions, procedures, and conduct of public officials and government agencies. The ombudsman may demand official reports, documents, and records; may summon officials to give testimony; and has access to official premises. Government agencies generally responded to the ombudsman's requests for information and documents within a reasonable time. While the ombudsman's recommendations are not binding on authorities, the government generally adopted them. The ombudsman noted in 2015 that he did not have adequate resources to initiate formal investigations.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Judicial Affairs and Education is responsible for legislative oversight of human rights in the country. The committee had adequate resources and was generally effective.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape carries a maximum penalty of 16 years in prison. Judges typically imposed sentences of two to three years. The law does not explicitly address spousal rape. Activists continued to complain that the burden of proof in rape cases was too heavy and discouraged victims from reporting acts of rape and authorities from prosecuting them. The government did not respond formally to these concerns.

In March parliament amended the general penal code to criminalize domestic violence specifically with a maximum penalty of 16 years in prison.

Violence against women continued to be a problem. Many victims declined to press charges because they did not think they would win their cases in court or they did not have the stamina to go through court proceedings. In a number of cases, victims were not able to press charges because the statute of limitations had expired. In 2015, the most recent year for which data were available, 9 percent of the clients of the Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence pressed charges.

Some local human rights monitors attributed the underreporting of domestic violence and sex crimes to the infrequency of convictions and to traditionally light sentences. Courts often based sentences on precedent and rarely made full use of the more stringent sentencing authority available under the law.

Victims of domestic violence can request police to remove perpetrators physically from the home for up to four weeks at a time. Police can also impose a 72-hour restraining order to prevent abusers from coming into proximity with the victim, and courts can extend this restraining order for up to a year. The law entitles victims of sex crimes to a lawyer to advise them of their rights and to help them pursue charges against the alleged assailants. In 2015 a total of 121 women sought assistance at the rape crisis center of the National University Hospital of Iceland, and 126 women sought temporary lodging at the country's shelter for women, mainly because of domestic violence. The shelter also offered counseling.

The government helped finance the Women's Shelter, the Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence, the rape crisis center of the national hospital, and other organizations that assisted victims of domestic or gender-based violence. In addition to partially funding such services, the government assisted immigrant women in abusive relationships, offering emergency accommodation, counseling, and information on legal rights.

Sexual Harassment: Two laws prohibit sexual harassment. The general penal code makes sexual harassment punishable by imprisonment for up to two years. The law on equal status defines sexual harassment more broadly as any type of unfair or offensive physical, verbal, or symbolic sexual behavior that is unwanted and affects the self-respect of the victim and is continued despite a clear indication that the behavior is undesired. The law requires employers and organization supervisors to make specific arrangements to prevent employees, students, and clients from becoming victims of gender-based or sexual harassment. Victims of harassment can report incidents to the Complaints Committee on Equal Status. The law requires only employers with 25 or more employees to provide employees information on the legal prohibitions against sexual harassment in the workplace. The law establishes fines for violations, but more severe penalties could be applicable under other laws. According to the latest available information from the State Prosecutor's Office, in 2015 prosecutors brought three cases to trial at the district court level and obtained convictions in two. One case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled in the case as of September 14.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children; manage their reproductive health; and have access to the information and means to do so, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence.

Discrimination: Women have the same legal status and rights as men according to the constitution and the law. The law states that employers and unions should work towards gender equality in the labor market, especially in managerial positions, and that employers should work towards declassifying jobs as primarily female- or male-oriented. Employment discrimination occurred (see section 7.d.). The Gender Equality Complaints Committee ruled that the National Archives of Iceland violated the law on equal status when it established a lower number of fixed monthly overtime hours for a female employee than for a male employee in a comparable position over a period of roughly two years.

Children

Birth Registration: A child acquires the country's citizenship at birth if both parents are citizens, if the mother is a citizen, or if the father is a citizen and is married to the child's foreign mother. If a mixed-nationality couple had obtained a judicial separation at the time when the child was conceived, however, the child acquires the mother's citizenship. A stateless child can become a citizen at the age of three. In all cases a child's access to social services depends on whether he or she has a residence permit in the country. Registration of birth was prompt.

Child Abuse: In 2015, the latest year for which data were available, local child protection committees, whose work the Agency for Child Protection coordinates, received 2,216 reports of abuse, including 1,282 reports of emotional abuse (including 676 reports of domestic violence), 491 of physical abuse, and 460 of sexual abuse (some cases counted as more than one kind of abuse).

The agency operated a diagnostic and short-term treatment center for abused and troubled minors, and was responsible for three long-term treatment facilities. It also coordinated the work of 27 committees throughout the country responsible for local management of child-protection cases. The local committees hired professionals with expertise in social work and child protection.

The government maintained a children's assessment center to accelerate prosecution of child sexual abuse cases and lessen the trauma experienced by the child.

The prime minister appoints the children's ombudsman, who acts independently of the government. The ombudsman's mandate is to protect children's rights, interests, and welfare. When investigating complaints, which typically involved physical and psychological abuse and inadequate accommodation for children with illnesses or disabilities, the ombudsman has access to all public and private institutions that housed or otherwise cared for children. The ombudsman is not empowered to intervene in individual cases but can investigate them for indications of a general trend. The ombudsman can also initiate cases at her discretion. While the ombudsman's recommendations are not binding on authorities, generally the government adopted them.

Early and Forced Marriage: The country's minimum age for marriage is 18 for both sexes.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits, with fines or imprisonment for up to two years, the payment, or promise to pay or render consideration of another type, for prostitution involving a child under the age of 18. The law prohibits child pornography, which is punishable by up to two years in prison. The law criminalizes statutory rape with incarceration for one to 16 years. The government effectively enforced these laws. The minimum age for consensual sex is 15.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at travel.state.gov/content/childabduction/en/legal/compliance.html.

Anti-Semitism

Officials estimated the Jewish community to be fewer than 100 individuals, and there is no synagogue or Jewish cultural center in the country. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, the judicial system, and the provision of other government services. The law provides that persons with disabilities receive preference for government and municipal jobs when they are at least as qualified as other applicants. Disability rights advocates asserted that the government did not fully implement the constitution and the law.

The law provides that persons with disabilities have access to buildings, information, and communications. Building regulations prescribe that buildings and building premises be designed in accordance with “universal design.” Universal design is meant to ensure that persons are not discriminated against on the basis of a disability or illness regarding access or the general use of buildings, and to ensure that people can safely enter and exit buildings, even under abnormal circumstances, such as in the case of fire. Disability rights advocates complained that authorities did not fully implement the law and regulations and access to public information was unsatisfactory, since not all persons with disabilities, in particular persons with vision disabilities, had access to the internet. While violations of these regulations are punishable by a fine or a jail sentence of up to two years, one of the main associations for persons with disabilities contended that authorities rarely, if ever, assessed penalties for noncompliance.

Employment discrimination occurred.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Immigrants, mainly of non-Western origin and from Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, and asylum seekers, suffered occasional incidents of harassment based on their ethnicity.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that some landlords were reluctant or unwilling to rent residential facilities to persons other than ethnic Icelanders. Employment discrimination occurred. In January the Directorate of Labor started offering services targeted at refugees and asylum seekers to assist them with finding employment. In September parliament approved an action plan on immigration issues for the years 2016-19, which included items focusing on providing equal employment opportunities for immigrants, prioritizing wage equality, and increasing continuing education opportunities and job-related education to strengthen contact networks.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

While the constitution does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, it does so implicitly. The law prohibits anyone from denying a person goods or services on an equal footing with others on grounds of that person's sexual orientation or gender identity. It also prohibits denying a person access to a public meeting place or other places open to the public on the same footing with others on grounds of that person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The law further prohibits incitement to hatred against persons on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the dissemination of hateful material.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Immigrants, mainly of non-Western origin, and asylum seekers, suffered occasional incidents of harassment based on their religious beliefs.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, and the government generally respected these rights. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. It is silent on whether workers fired for union activity should be reinstated, but it provides for fining employers who engage in this practice. The law permits the government to pass a provisional law to impose mandatory mediation when strikes threaten key sectors in the economy, and the government did so once during the year to prohibit a strike by air traffic controllers.

The government effectively enforced the law. Penalties for violations (damages and fines) were sufficient to deter violations.

The government and employers respected freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively. Collective bargaining agreements covered nearly 100 percent of the formal economy's workforce. Independent contractors in various industries, but mainly in construction and tourism, sometimes hired subcontractors to avoid hiring workers with bargaining rights.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor.

Authorities in the Directorate of Labor and the Directorate of Immigration effectively enforced the law. Resources were adequate during the year, although there were no prosecutions. The law is sufficiently stringent compared with those on other serious crimes and stipulates that violations are punishable by imprisonment for up to 12 years.

Traffickers subjected men and women to forced labor in construction, tourism, restaurants, and fish factories, as well as au pairs in private houses. Foreign “posted workers” are at particular risk of forced labor because traffickers pay them in their home countries and contract them to work for up to 183 days in Iceland to avoid taxes and union fees, limiting tax authorities’ and union officials’ ability to monitor their work conditions and pay. Traffickers also subjected women to domestic servitude and forced labor and men to forced labor, sometimes through forced marriage.

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

According to the law, children ages 13 and 14 may be employed in light work up to 12 hours per week and a maximum of two hours per day outside organized school teaching hours during the school year, and up to 35 hours a week or a maximum of seven hours per day during school vacations. They may not work between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. Children between the ages of 15 and 18 who do not attend school may work up to 40 hours per week and a maximum of eight hours per day, but not between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. For children who remain in school, the law limits work to 12 hours per week and a maximum two hours per day during the school year, but up to 40 hours per week and a maximum eight hours per day during school vacations. They may not work between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. Children under 18 may not be employed in the following types of work: work that is likely to be beyond their physical or mental capacity; work that is likely to cause permanent damage to health; work that involves the risk of hazardous radiation; work involving a risk of accidents which it can be assumed that children and teenagers could have difficulty identifying or avoiding due to their lack of awareness or lack of experience or

training; or work where there is a risk of violence or other specific risk, except where the young persons work with adults. The government generally enforced the law. There were no known cases of child labor.

The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health (AOSH) enforced child labor laws and regulations with effective inspections and penalties, which can range from fines to prison sentences.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

Labor laws and regulations do not specifically prohibit discrimination regarding race, color, religion, political opinion, national origin, citizenship, social origin, disability, language, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, HIV-positive status or other communicable diseases. Nevertheless, the constitution and other laws prohibit such discrimination in general and for violations provide for fines determined by the courts. The government effectively enforced the law.

Despite laws that require equal pay for equal work, a pay gap existed between men and women. According to a salary survey of its members conducted by the Association of Academics and published in June, the gender-based pay gap amounted to 11.7 percent after taking into consideration number of hours worked, age, education, number of employees supervised, and financial responsibility. According to a salary survey of its members conducted by the country's largest labor union, the VR, and published in September, the gender-based pay gap amounted to 10 percent after taking into consideration age, length of employment, profession, job sector, education, number of employees supervised, number of hours worked, and shift work.

According to a salary survey of their members conducted for the Union of Public Servants and the Reykjavik City Municipal Employees Association and published in September, the gender pay gap amounted to 11.8 and 6.1 percent among the unions' membership, respectively, after taking into consideration age, working hours, length of employment, type of profession, education, shift differential, and type of sector.

Anecdotal evidence suggested some employers might without reason limit their hiring to native Icelandic-speaking individuals. Disability rights advocates asserted that persons with disabilities had a more difficult time finding jobs due to prejudice and because fewer job opportunities, especially part time, were available for persons with disabilities. The positions that persons with disabilities were able

to find were usually low paying, required only a low level of education or skills, and offered limited opportunities for advancement.

In September the Directorate of Labor began a one-year project to increase the number and diversity of job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not establish a minimum wage. The minimum wages negotiated in various collective bargaining agreements applied automatically to all employees in those occupations, including foreign workers, regardless of union membership. While the agreements can be either industry-wide, sector-wide, or in some cases firm-specific, the type of position defined the negotiated wage levels.

The standard legal workweek is 40 hours, and paid annual holidays include 14 full days and two half-days. The law requires that employers compensate work exceeding eight hours per day as overtime. Overtime pay does not vary significantly across unions, but collective bargaining agreements determine the terms of overtime pay. The law limits the time a worker may work, including overtime, to 48 hours a week on average during each four-month period. The law entitles workers to 11 hours of rest in each 24-hour period and one day off each week. Under specially defined circumstances, employers may reduce the 11-hour rest period to no less than eight hours, but they must then compensate workers with corresponding rest time later. They may also postpone a worker's day off, but the worker must receive the corresponding rest time within 14 days. The AOSH monitored and enforced these regulations.

The law sets occupational health and safety standards, which are appropriate for the main industries, and the Ministry of Welfare administered and enforced them through the AOSH, which conducted both proactive and reactive inspections. The ministry can close workplaces that fail to meet safety and health standards, and temporarily prohibited certain tasks in workplaces in 48 instances. Workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment.

The AOSH did not employ a sufficient number of inspectors to enforce standards effectively in all sectors. The AOSH levied daily fines on companies that did not follow instructions, urging them to improve work conditions. Daily fines were generally sufficient to deter violations. The AOSH strengthened its systematic inspection of land-based fish processing and initiated a formal interagency effort to

guarantee coordinated enforcement actions against violators of the labor law and occupational health and safety standards. With the exception of certain asylum seekers, the government provided universal health-care coverage to all workers, including those in the informal economy.

Violations of wage and overtime standards were most common in the construction and tourism sectors. The Icelandic Federation of Labor stated that young persons in the tourism sector, as well as foreign workers, primarily men in the construction industry, some of them undocumented, were paid less than the negotiated minimum wage. Although violations of occupational safety and health standards occurred in all sectors, violations occurred most frequently in the construction and food industries. Young workers and employees who did not understand or speak Icelandic and did not know local rules and regulations were more likely to be subject to hazardous or exploitative working conditions.