

## Gender Equality in Iceland - Factsheet

Icelanders take pride in their fellow Icelanders who do well.

The most recent source of pride is Iceland's performance in "the art and the sport" of gender equality. For the 9th year in a row, Iceland was the frontrunner according to the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum in 2017. It does not mean Iceland is perfect. Far from it as the #metoo in Iceland brought to light from the shadow and dark corners.... In relative terms, however, Iceland has many things to pride itself off.

**Exclusive paternity leave** – Iceland celebrated the millennium by introducing the first exclusive paternity leave in the world. Why? Good intentions only take you so far while paving the way for gender equality so despite equal access to education and the labour market as well as day care centres, women continued to be the primary caretakers of children and home. How to change that? The individual and non-transferable paternity leave means that the leave cannot be transferred over to the mother. As such, it asserts the equal right and the duty of fathers and mothers to be the primary caretakers of their child upon its birth and the right of the child to be equally cared for by both parents. What are the implications? Well, 74%-90% of fathers have been taking paternity leave since its inception in year 2000 to care for their children as infants. Research has demonstrated the following positive impact:

- The relationship between Icelandic fathers and their children is significantly better than in countries where there is no paternity leave.
- Father's usage of the leave is initiating or supporting other changes such as more equal division of household tasks and the labor market participation of men and women.
- Fathers generally make use of their rights and that it is socially well acceptable for fathers to be at home with their children
- The law has changed ideas about masculinity / femininity and manhood / womanhood based on rigid gender stereotypes
- **Key conclusion:** the relatively little participation of men in the care of their own children may rather be because of lack of social opportunities, rather than lack of interest or abilities. Let's give fathers a chance!
- **Future plans:** The government plans to increase the exclusive maternity and the paternity leave from 4 months to 5 months and decreased the time period, which the parents can share between them, from three to two months! Yes, we can always do better on our path towards the 50-50 perfection proportion!

**The Gender Pay Gap = not Cool!** The gender pay gap, namely the higher salary men receive compared to women for work of the same or equal value and that can only be understood as a negative bias against women – is a worldwide problem of gender discrimination. In Iceland, such discrimination has been prohibited by law since 1961. Still, it continued despite women's strike in year 1975 and as years and decades passed by.... What to do? In January 2018, the government introduced the Equal Pay Standard and the Certification by law. What is that? It is simply a tool to enforce the letter of law from 1961, as well as the principle of non-discrimination and the spirit of merits based economy and society. How does it work? All workplaces with 25 or more staff have to introduce and activate a system consisting of gender equality policy and pay system and have the system certified that in turn verifies that men and women doing work of the same or equal value within the same workplace are receiving the same salary. Simple as that and only fair, right? What are the implications? Well, employers who have justifying gender discrimination in pay by saying that the female employee did not ask for the same salary as the male employee cannot do that anymore because the Equal Pay Standard makes the salary system more transparent and moreover, it moves the responsibility for respecting the law from the employee to the employer. We in Iceland finally figured out how to ensure fairness. Why don't you follow suite and join Iceland in walking the talk!

**Are women good enough for God?** To be or not to be...that is the question. Women during pagan times could serve as religious authorities. However, after converting to Christianity (under the threat of force) women were not good enough anymore. As women began to fight for their rights, they also wanted equality in front of the eyes of God. They managed to obtain the right to serve as priests in 1914 and the year after, women got a conditional suffrage and universal suffrage in 1920. However, it was not until the message of the women's rights movement had infiltrated theology that the first woman to serve as a priest was appointed in 1974 and she referred to God as She... The first Bishop in Iceland was appointed in 2009, the same year as the first woman and gay Prime Minister in Iceland took power. Big leap forward: two in one! To a certain extent, these coinciding developments are not coincidence. If women are not good enough for God to be the servants of are they - by association - good enough to be politicians, prime ministers, presidents? Just a thought...

**For further information:**

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