



# City of Reykjavík

The role of the Human Rights  
Office and an overview of human  
rights projects



## **The Human Rights Policy**

The City of Reykjavík's Human Rights Policy was approved in 2006 and revised in 2013. It is based on human rights and the principle of equality and aims to allow all people to enjoy their human rights regardless of origin, nationality, skin colour, religious and political beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, age, financial situation, heritage, disability, medical condition or any other status.

Through working towards a uniform human rights policy, emphasis is placed on a coordinated vision for the benefit of city inhabitants, inasmuch as many of them belong to more than one of the groups it covers. The common thread or the main emphasis is however put on gender equality.

Municipalities are, according to the equality law in Iceland, required to work on gender mainstreaming in all areas. The Human Rights committee and Human Rights Office are responsible for enforcing the policy.

The Human Rights Policy is available in several languages and can be found in English here: [rvk.is/humanrights](http://rvk.is/humanrights)

## **The Human Rights Council**

Human Rights Council operates on behalf of the Reykjavík's City Council. The Human Rights Council is responsible for formulating policies on human rights, taking decisions concerning human rights and making recommendations to the city council on issues concerning human rights. Furthermore, the Council oversees The Human Rights Office and follows up on the human rights policy and the act on equal status and equal rights for both women and men.



The Council makes recommendations to the City Council on human rights in Reykjavik and cooperates with the state, other municipalities and organizations and grassroots movements working on human rights.

## **The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life**

Reykjavik signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life in 2009. Signing the charter involves certain obligations, but the city has, along with other local municipalities in Iceland that signed the treaty, decided to focus on the following articles:

Article 6 – Countering Stereotypes

Article 9 – Gender Assessment

Article 22 – Gender-Based Violence

Reykjavik is additionally focusing on the following articles:

Article 10 – Multiple Discrimination or Disadvantage

Article 11 - The employer role

Article 12 - Public procurement and contracts

Article 20 – Culture, Sport and Recreation

## Action Plan for Gender Equality

Municipalities are required by law to submit an action plan for gender equality.

Reykjavík's Action Plan, valid from 2011 to 2015, contains 25 measures directed at countering stereotypes, gender mainstreaming, and equal opportunities within the workplace, culture, sport and gender-based violence.

### Gender based violence

Research and several surveys done in recent years on violence in Iceland, both against women and children, has increased knowledge of the nature, extent and consequences of gender based violence. That again has provided both the Icelandic government and municipalities with the opportunity to fight violence systematically. A survey on violence showed that about 42% of women in Iceland from the age of 16 have suffered intimidation, violence and sexual harassment that caused them distress. Judging from the results of the study the violence was often serious. The survey showed that 22% of the women have experienced violence in close relationships and of those 26% said that their life had been in danger during the last violent incident, and 41% said that they had suffered physical harm.



Reykjavík's Action Plan of 33 measures against gender-based violence and violence against children was approved by the City Council in 2012.

### Together Against Violence

Reykjavík City started in January 2015 a project **Together Against Violence** in cooperation with the Capital Area Police Department and the Women's Shelter in Iceland. The aim of the project is to send a clear message that domestic violence will not be tolerated, to improve the city's services to both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic violence and to strengthen cooperation between the institutions that work on the issue. Emphasis is being placed on taking appropriate measures as soon as violence in close relationships is detected. As a part of that measure a social worker will accompany police officers to the scene when domestic violence is reported, the visit is followed up with a phone call within three days and by a visit by the police and the Welfare department/social worker within a week. If there is a child registered at the home where domestic violence is reported, a psychologist or social worker on the behalf of The Child Protection Department visits home. Special focus is being placed on women of foreign origin and women with disabilities.

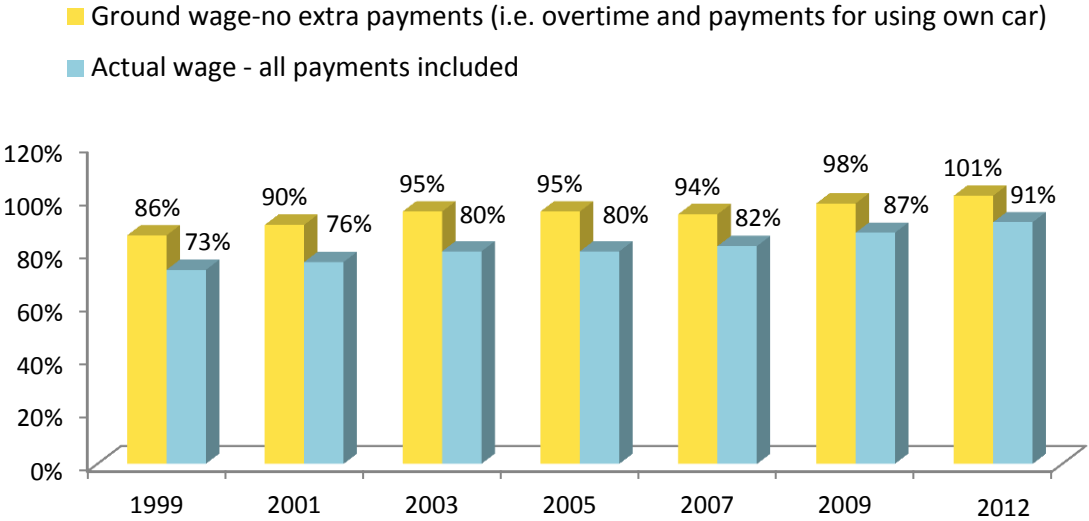
### Gender equality in education (schools and leisure)

Equality is one of the foundations of the national curriculum for compulsory schools. To support this part of the curriculum the Department for Education and Youth has begun a twofold project. One part is (a session) aimed at training their employees in equality. The other part is a collection of materials, published on a special website, to use in teaching equality or how to mainstream it into teaching. The same website will give ideas for all kinds of projects and some guidelines for their implementation.

**Gender pay gap – monitoring**

The gender pay gap has lessened gradually, as can be seen in figure 1, since the City of Reykjavik started to monitor it in 1999. The figure shows the raw gender wage gap when no adjustments have been done for i.e. for overtime or occupation. The information is based on the wages of fulltime workers in October every other year from 1999. It is based on actual information from the City’s data base (payroll).

*Figure 1. Women’s wage as a percentage of men’s wage. Full time city employees shown October of each year.*



As can be seen in figure 1 the main difference lies in actual wages i.e. when payments for overtime and using own car for work purposes is included. In relation to this it is important to note that the city has two ways of paying for overtime.

The mayor has put forth a plan to eliminate the gender pay gap that is now being worked on.

**Statistics – women and men**

On International Women's Day, March 8th, the Human Rights Office publishes a brochure on some statistics of women and men in Reykjavik. Some information is quite traditional, on population and professions while other information is presented in order to draw attention to specific issues. It can be the number of women and men visiting the city's swimming pools with men outnumbering women at all locations. It can also be information on the percentage of statues in the city showing men and women, the admissions for alcohol and drug abuse by gender or the turnout by gender in the last municipality elections.

Figure 2. Admissions for alcohol and drug abuse treatment in 2013 by gender.

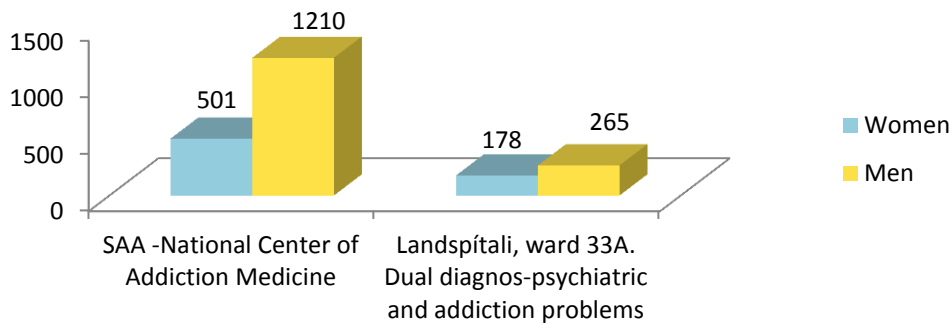
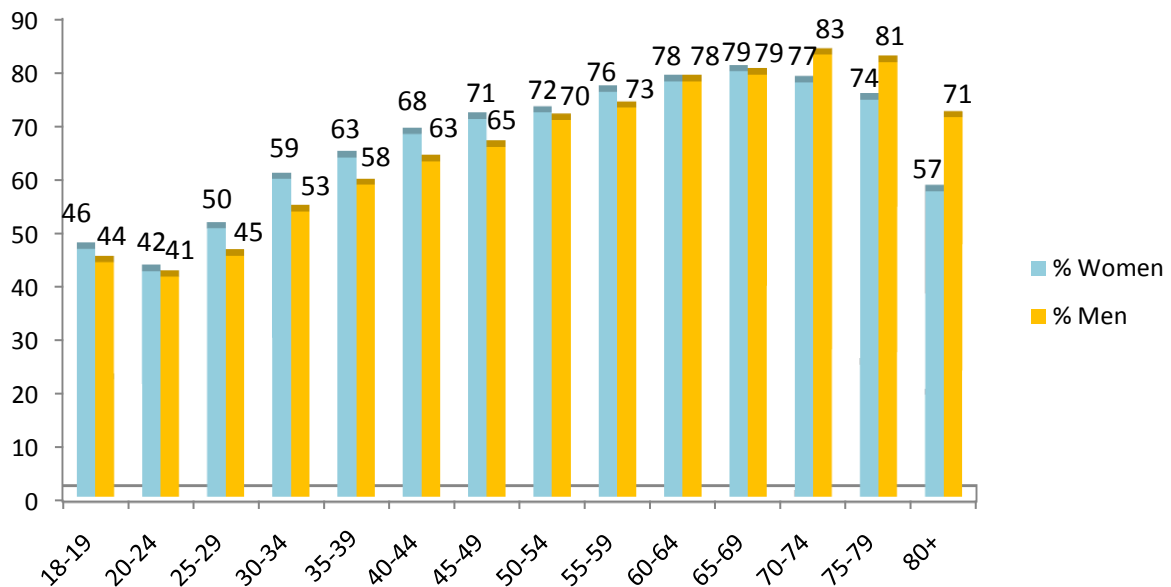


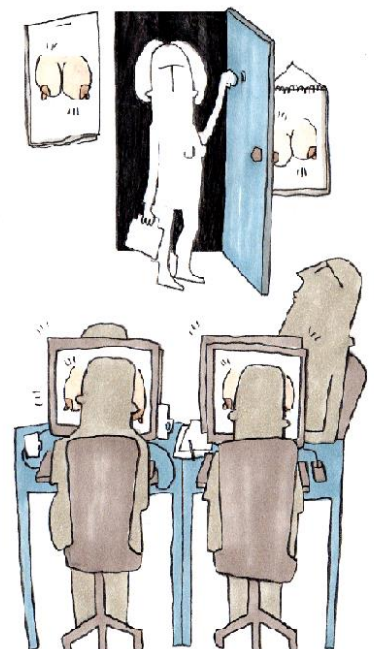
Figure 3. Percentage of women and men voting in the last municipality elections, 2014, in Reykjavik.



### Pornification is sexual harassment

In 2012 The Reykjavik City Human Rights Office and MARK - Centre for Research on Gender and Diversity at the University of Iceland published a brochure in Icelandic and English called *Pornification is Sexual Harassment*. The brochure highlights how women experience pornography at work and discussion concerning their looks instead of performance in the workplace. It is argued that pornification, whether it appears in words or images, is sexual harassment.

Information on this topic has not previously been published in Icelandic and the brochure is intended for the staff of Reykjavik and the staff and students of the University of Iceland. It can be



found both on the city's website and the University of Iceland's website and can be used by everyone.

The brochure can be found here on the website: [rvk.is/humanrights](http://rvk.is/humanrights)

## Herstory

A brochure on a history walk has been published in cooperation the Women's History Archives of Iceland. It draws attention to women's role in the shaping of cities, which is often forgotten. Is published both in Icelandic and English.

The brochure can be found on the website: [rvk.is/humanrights](http://rvk.is/humanrights)



## Gender budgeting

Reykjavik has begun the implementation of gender budgeting. In 2012 the city ran a pilot project with the involvement of every department and office within the city, altogether 17 projects. Gender budgeting is now a part of the general budget process.

Gender budgeting objectives are:

- ✓ Making the impact on both genders visible.
- ✓ Making it possible to respond and reevaluate policies, expenditures and sources of income to support the objectives of equality for women and men.

Using the tools of gender budgeting has already proved to be very fruitful as it has unmasked a lot of things both concerning decision making and concerning the services of the city which were previously hidden. Information in English can be found on the website: [rvk.is/humanrights](http://rvk.is/humanrights)

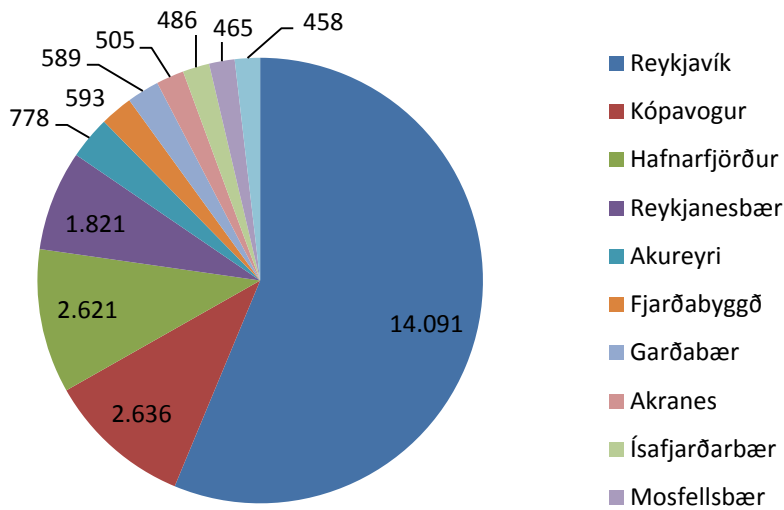
## Immigrants in Reykjavík

In January 2014 there were 22.744 people with foreign citizenship living in Iceland, 11.090 women and 11.654 men. At the same time 14.091 people with foreign citizenship lived in Reykjavík, 7.204 women and 6.887 men.

The largest number of foreign citizens live in Reykjavík as can be seen in figure 4.

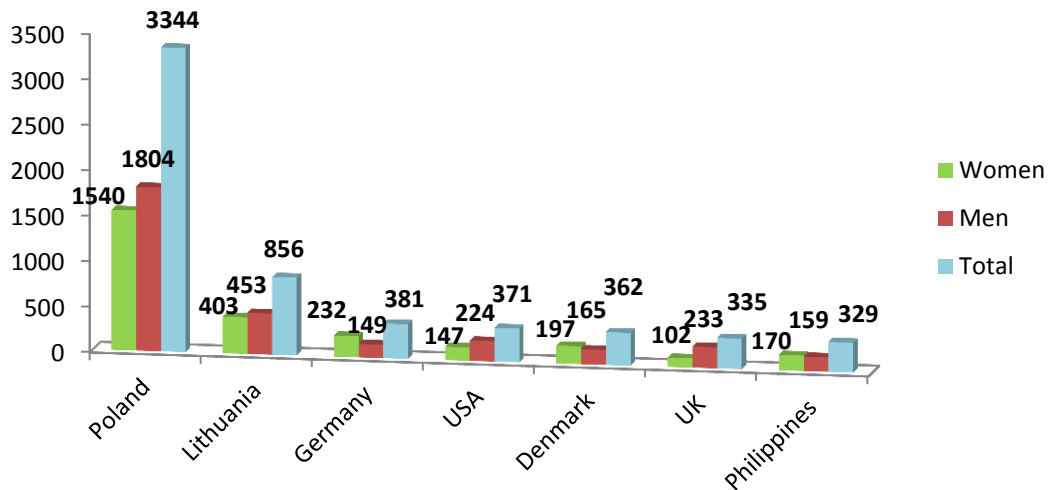


Figure 4. The number of foreign citizens in the municipalities where most foreign citizens have residence, January 2014



Immigrants from Poland are the largest group of foreign citizens in Reykjavík, see figure 3.

Figure 3. The seven biggest groups/nationalities in Reykjavik 2014 with foreign citizenship.



The Reykjavík City Human Rights Office has offered services for immigrants since 2010. The aim is to increase immigrants access to city services, to promote civic empowerment and to enhance immigrants participation. Four counsellors offer information and counselling to immigrants living in Reykjavík.

The counsellors speak Icelandic, English, Polish and Arabic. Interpreters in other languages are provided free of charge when needed. Counselling takes place in the City Hall and the Public Library.

**The aim of the service:**

- ✓ Identify which city services are available and help immigrants to access those services, such as financial assistance, rent benefits or social workers.
- ✓ Give information about the rights and obligations.
- ✓ Find solutions in family matters, e.g. child support, divorce and custody.
- ✓ Advise victims of gender-based and domestic violence where they may seek help.
- ✓ Inform about residence permits and applying for Icelandic citizenship.
- ✓ Advise immigrants about work related issues.
- ✓ Help immigrants to find local organizations that can address their needs such as schools of Icelandic language and adult education centres, cultural and religious centres, women's and family help services and leisure and sport clubs.

The counsellors at the Reykjavik Human Rights Office maintain two Facebook pages for immigrants living in Reykjavik in English: <https://www.facebook.com/LivingInReykjavik> and Polish: <https://www.facebook.com/Reykjavik.Nasze.miasto>

**Our Children and Ourselves**

In cooperation with the Welfare Ministry, the Human Rights Office published the booklet *Our Children and Ourselves* in multiple languages. The booklet is intended as a simple guide for parents and families of children about their responsibilities, children's rights, education and welfare. The booklet was printed, but it can also be found on the website [rvk.is/humanrights](http://rvk.is/humanrights).

**Multicultural Day in Reykjavik**

Since 2005 Reykjavik City has sponsored and organized a Multicultural Day for celebrating the city's diversity. The day begins with a parade starting in mid-town and finishing at City Hall where there is an exciting festival with entertainment, crafts, food and insights into various different cultures and countries.

**The Multicultural Congress in Reykjavik**

The Human Right Office has held three Multicultural Congresses. The first one was in 2010 and the second one in November of 2012 and the third one in 2014.

People of foreign origin are especially invited to come and have an impact where the city's services need to be improved. Emphasis is also put in learning about their opinions and experiences such as finding ways to facilitate mutual integration.

A great number of people participated in congresses. The main goal is to reach as many immigrants as possible and the discussion which takes place in small groups sitting around round tables. The discussions have been in the following languages: English, Icelandic, Spanish, Polish, Thai, Vietnamese, Cebuano, Russian and Lithuanian.



## **The Multicultural Council**

Five representatives are part of the Multicultural Council. Its role is to act as an advisory body for the Human Rights Council of Reykjavík and other institutions or departments in the city that work with immigrants. Its role is also to connect multicultural communities in Iceland, build bridges between Icelanders and immigrants, be spoke people for immigrant issues and to contribute to a peaceful multicultural society. The Human Rights Office is in service and assistance of the Multicultural Council.

## **ICORN**

Reykjavík City is a member of ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network) which is an association of cities around the world dedicated to the value of freedom of expression. Writers have been targets of politically motivated threats and persecution, and by joining the network cities can provide these writers with a secure place to stay.

Each ICORN city focuses on one writer at a time. By providing a safe place to stay for a Guest Writer and economic security for a standard term of two years, ICORN cities make an important, practical contribution to the promotion of freedom of expression, which is the cornerstone of human rights. The Human Rights Office is responsible for all the practical issues connected to the ICORN project.

## **Employment - people with disabilities**

The Human Rights Office maps also the work situation of people with disabilities employed by the city as well as identifying new methods to increase work market participation of people with disabilities in cooperation with government and municipal institutions.

## **Disability Access Committee**

The administration and leadership for the City's Disability Access Committee is the responsibility of the Human Rights Office. According to the mandate of the committee, its role is to encourage that all buildings owned by Reykjavík City, other facilities rented by the city, as well as streets, pavements and other public spaces in the city, are accessible to people with disabilities suitable to their various access needs.

## **The Elders Council**

The Council provides information and promotes cooperation between the City and interest groups. It formulates policies and makes recommendations to the city council on issues connected to its role.

The administration for the Elders Council is the responsibility of the Human Rights Office.



## Contact information

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