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# Government Actions against Gender-based and Sexual Violence and Harassment 2020-2023

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# Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Acts, Parliamentary Resolutions and Action Plans.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Statutory amendments .....	5
2.2 Parliamentary Resolutions and action plans .....	7
<b>3. Actions against Gender-based and Sexual Violence and Harassment.....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Preventive measures and awareness raising .....	10
3.2 Actions to benefit victims.....	11
3.2.1 Grants to resources for victims .....	12
3.2.2 Reports and analysis.....	14
3.3 Resources for perpetrators .....	16
3.4 Actions in response to the COVID-19 epidemic .....	16
3.4.1 Action Team on Violence and its actions .....	16
3.4.2 Grants in response to the COVID-19 pandemic .....	18
3.5 Other government actions .....	19
3.5.1 The hotline 112 electronic portal on violence .....	19
3.5.2 Projects related to schools and youth .....	20
3.5.3 Labour market actions .....	21
<b>4. International Agreements and Conventions .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5. Other Projects .....</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1 International co-operation .....	24
5.2 Conferences on sexual and gender-based violence .....	24

# 1. Introduction

The policy platforms of the coalition governments of the Progressive Party, Independence Party and the Left-Green Movement have emphasised working systematically on actions against gender-based violence, reforms in the handling of sexual offences in the justice system and the strengthening of prevention and education against sexual and gender-based violence and harassment.

This has been done by reviewing and amending legislation, with action plans in the form of Parliamentary Resolutions, with increased budget appropriations earmarked for these issues, for example, to the police, and grants to various organisations working on these issues.

The following summary gives a good overview of the government's main actions. A similar [summary](#) was issued in May 2021.

## 2. Acts, Parliamentary Resolutions and Action Plans

### 2.1 Statutory amendments

#### **Act amending the General Penal Code, No. 19/1940 (sexual privacy)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the General Penal Code concerning sexual privacy was [adopted](#) by the Icelandic parliament Althingi in February 2021. The legislation was prompted by increased digital sexual violence in Icelandic society. No definitive definition of the term was available, but it refers to conduct involving the use of digital communication to create, distribute or publish sexual images of others without permission. However, such violations can also occur without the use of digital technology.

The Act includes amendments to provisions of the General Penal Code concerning sexual offences, on the one hand, and violation of personal privacy, on the other. It also provides for changes to the Act on Criminal Procedure to ensure the effect of the amendments to the Penal Code adopted. The Act aims to strengthen the legal protection of individuals in view of the societal changes that have taken place with increased use of technology and changes in attitudes towards sexual offences in Iceland.

#### **Act amending the General Penal Code, Act No. 19/1940 (stalking)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the General Penal Code concerning stalking was [passed](#) by the Althingi in February 2021. It added the following Article: "Any person who repeatedly threatens, pursues, monitors, contacts or by other comparable means stalks another person through conduct liable to cause fear or anxiety shall be subject to fines or imprisonment for up to 4 years."

#### **Act amending the General Penal Code, Act No. 19/1940 (human trafficking)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the human trafficking provisions of the General Penal Code was [passed](#) in June 2021. It altered the provisions of the General Penal Code, Act No. 19/1940, concerning human trafficking in the first paragraph of Art. 227 a, to further strengthen the legal protection for victims of human trafficking and facilitate prosecution of perpetrators. The Act addresses the description of human trafficking, to ensure better protection for victims of various forms of coercion.

#### **Act amending the General Penal Code, No. 19/1940 (child sexual abuse material, hate speech, discrimination etc.)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the General Penal Code, Act No. 19/1940, concerning child sexual abuse material (CSAM), hate speech,

discrimination, etc. was [passed](#) by the Althingi in June 2022. The main changes were as follows:

- **Firstly**, in determining punishment, cf. Art. 70 of the Act, consideration shall be given to whether the offence can be attributed to specified aspects concerning the victim personally, therefore making the offence a type of hate crime. In addition, as a general rule, it should contribute to increasing the punishment if an offence is committed in the presence of a child under 15 years of age.
- **Secondly**, and closely related to the first point, the hate speech provision of Art. 233 a of the General Penal Code was expanded to include ethnic origin unequivocally and to provide protection for people with disabilities and people with atypical sexual characteristics comparable to that of other groups considered to need special protection.
- **In the third place**, a similar amendment was made to the first paragraph of Art. 180 of the General Penal Code so that the same groups enjoy protection under that provision as under Art. 233 a. This means, among other things, that it is a criminal offence to deny persons with disabilities a product or service on the same terms as others.
- **Fourthly**, the CSAM provision of Art. 210 a of the Act was divided into four paragraphs. CSAM is defined and the maximum punishment increased, while at the same time it is stipulated that the provision does not apply to personal contact between young people if further conditions are met.
- **Fifthly** and finally, a new provision was added, Art. 210 c, on repetitive and related violations of the CSAM provisions, i.e. Articles 210 a and 210 b.

**Act amending the Act on Marriage, No. 31/1993 (age of spouses-to-be, examiners etc.)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the Act on Marriage was [adopted](#) by the Althingi in June 2022. The law abolished the exemption from the ban on marriage of persons under 18 years of age. It codified a general principle for recognition of marriages performed abroad. Under the Act, marriages of individuals under the age of 18 that take place abroad are not recognised in Iceland, with very strict exceptions. The aim of the changes is to harmonise the Marriage Act with international recommendations and views regarding the minimum age for marriage. Furthermore, the intention is to improve the quality of examinations made of the conditions for marriages, to harmonise practices, respond to criticism of existing legislation on jurisdiction in divorce proceedings and make the Act consistent with the rules that apply elsewhere in Nordic countries.

**Act amending the Act on Criminal Procedure, No. 88/2008 (legal status of victims, people with disabilities and family members)**

The bill of the Minister of Justice amending the Act on Criminal Procedure was [adopted](#) in June 2022. The aim of the amendments is to improve the legal

situation of victims and people with disabilities, as well as that of family members of deceased persons, both during investigation by the police and court procedure. The main changes and innovations are that the legal adviser's access to data during the investigation phase is basically the same as that of the defence attorney; that the victim is allowed to attend a closed court session after having given their statement; that the legal adviser is authorised to directly question witnesses in court; and that victims are to a greater extent appointed legal advisers in the handling of appealed cases. In certain cases, the judge can decide that the questioning of a disabled victim or witness be held in specially equipped premises, and that the judge can call upon expert assistance during the questioning of a disabled witness. In cases where the police investigation focuses on the cause of the victim's death, a family member of the deceased victim will be authorised to act as a representative of the deceased during the investigation of the case by the police and, in certain instances, it will be possible to appoint a legal adviser for the representative.

#### **Act amending the Healthcare Practitioners Act, No. 34/ 2012 (reporting domestic violence)**

The bill of the Minister of Health amending the Act on Healthcare Practitioners concerning the reporting domestic violence was [adopted](#) in May 2023. With the adoption of the Act, healthcare practitioners are now authorised to report domestic violence to the police at the patient's request. In such cases, the patient's general personal information, information about the patient's injuries, as well as other information related to the violence and the patient's situation may be passed on to the police where considered necessary in order for the police to take appropriate measures to ensure the necessary protection and support for the patient. It is necessary to increase the flow of information from the health system to the police in these cases and improve co-operation to ensure protection and support for the victim and reduce the likelihood of repeated violence. The objective of the Act is to satisfy more clearly obligations that Iceland has undertaken under the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

## **2.2 Parliamentary Resolutions and action plans**

#### **Parliamentary Resolution on preventive actions among children and young people against sexual and gender-based violence and harassment, together with a plan of action for the years 2021–2025**

The first comprehensive plan on [preventive actions among children and young people against sexual and gender-based violence and harassment, together with a plan of action for the years 2021-2025](#), was approved by the Althingi in the summer of 2020 and is fully funded. The plan is based on Iceland's international commitments, including those concerning eradication of violence against women and children. Its implementation is monitored by the Prime Minister's Office.

For the first time comprehensive improvements are proposed, based on preventive actions that are integrated with teaching and work at all school levels, in leisure centres, community centres and other youth and leisure activities. The Prime Minister's Office is responsible for co-ordinating working methods, clarifying responsibilities, analysing overlaps and establishing good co-operation between the responsible parties in the implementation of the plan. There are 18 responsible parties, including the following key parties: the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, the Directorate of Education, the Government Agency for Child Protection, the Directorate of Health and local education offices.

Since the Parliamentary Resolution was approved, a prevention officer has been hired at the Association of Icelandic Municipalities, whose role it is to follow up on the plan. The website [Stopp-ofbeldi.is](https://stopp-afbeldi.is) has been created, providing a variety of learning and educational material aimed at the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in a single location. Interactive [online courses](#) with basic education about sexual and gender-based violence and harassment have been published on the website of the National Agency for Children and Families, explaining symptoms of children who have experienced sexual violence and how to react if a child reports violence, intended for persons who work with children and young people. More details on the further progress of individual actions can be accessed on [a dashboard](#) showing the status of actions in the parliamentary resolution.

#### **Action Plan for the Handling of Sexual Offences 2023–2025**

[The Action Plan for the Handling of Sexual Offences 2023-2025](#) was published in March 2023. In drafting the plan consideration was given, among other things, to recommendations from the report of GREVIO, the monitoring committee on the implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Through this action plan systematic efforts directed at improving the handling of sexual offences in the judicial system will continue. Emphasis is placed on speeding up the processing of sexual offence cases, for instance, with increased budget appropriations and an increase in the number of full-time employees investigating sexual offences. In addition the aim is to improve the experience of and services for both victims and defendants, including by offering victims a suitable support interview with a professional following questioning by the police, and increasing information disclosure by the police to victims on the progress of their cases.

#### **Parliamentary Resolution on a plan for 2019-2022 on measures against violence and its consequences**

[The Action Plan on Measures against Violence and its Consequences for 2019-2022](#) submitted by the Minister of Social Affairs and Children, was approved by the Althingi in the summer of 2019. The main objectives of the government's action plan are to promote awareness of the issue through prevention measures



and education, to improve procedures and handling of cases within the justice system and to strengthen support for victims.

A [Status report](#) was published to follow up on the Parliamentary Resolution on a plan for 2019-2022 on measures against violence and its consequences. Among those actions which have been completed are the establishment of a comprehensive professional council on bullying at all school levels as well as in sports and youth activities; the creation of a knowledge centre on violence against children; and awareness-raising work in society on the importance of combating hate speech. Furthermore, education about violence has been promoted among persons working within the justice system; emphasis has been placed on raising awareness about bullying and violence in the workplace; and an information website about violence has been set up (112.is) where violence can be reported and information obtained on remedies and services available to both victims and perpetrators of violence. The activities of Bjarkarhlíð, a service centre for victims of violence, have also been made permanent. The first National Consultation Forum was held on actions against violence and its consequences.

#### **Parliamentary Resolution on a National Action Plan on Immigration Issues for 2022-2025**

In June 2022 a [Parliamentary Resolution on a National Action Plan on Immigration Issues for 2022-2025](#) was adopted. One of the actions under the plan is aimed at ensuring that victims and perpetrators of violence of foreign origin know the services and resources that are available. Furthermore, that those providing services and emergency response receive training on immigration issues, cultural sensitivity and multiculturalism. The action consists in ensuring that education and resources for victims and perpetrators of violence throughout Iceland take into account the needs of immigrants who do not speak Icelandic or English sufficiently well, and pay special attention to the needs of children.

#### **Resolution on an Action Plan in LGBTQ Issues for 2022–2025.**

In June 2022 a Parliamentary Resolution was adopted on an [Action Plan in LGBTQ Issues for 2022-2025](#). The program is the first to deal exclusively with the issues of LGBTQ people. It includes an action focusing on LGBTQ people and domestic violence with the aim of creating knowledge about domestic violence among LGBTQ people and combating it. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is responsible for the action and has worked with the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police and the NGO Samtökin '78 in preparing the investigation. A [dashboard](#) has been created, showing the status of actions in the approved Action Plan in LGBTQ issues.

## 3. Actions against Gender-based and Sexual Violence and Harassment

### 3.1 Preventive measures and awareness raising

The government has embarked on various preventive measures and awareness-raising based on the recommendations of a working group on prevention and awareness-raising to combat sexual offences and gender-based violence and harassment.

#### Prevention

The National Commissioner of Police has, in co-operation with the police departments nationwide, worked on prevention of digital violence among children and young people, including an awareness-raising campaign at the beginning of 2022. A presentation was distributed to all compulsory schools in the country with teenage classes, intended for students in the 8th grade concerning digital violence and the value of consent in digital and sexual communication. This included instructions for teachers and an information letter for the children's parents in Icelandic, English and Polish. Where community police were active, the educational material was followed-up with visits to compulsory and secondary schools. Information and advice on Internet safety for children has also been added to the 112.is website.

The National Commissioner of Police received a grant of ISK 10 million at the beginning of 2023 to develop technical solutions and to set up a notification portal and information sharing to ensure that children can use the Internet in a way that is compatible with their right to protection from harmful content.

#### Awareness-raising campaign against child abuse

The awareness-raising campaign *"Take the step"* (*Taktu skrefið*) against digital sexual relations between adults and children was launched in the fall of 2023. The campaign encouraged persons who view, search for, display, save, possess or distribute sexual material of children to cease these activities and seek the help of experts through the resource *"Take the step"*.

#### Awareness raising against sexual violence in three phases

The first phase of the awareness-raising campaign was titled *"Is everything okay?"* (*Er allt í góðu?*) and started in early March 2022, focusing on partying and social activities. The campaign encouraged the public to be on the lookout for violence and ask the question: *"Is everything okay?"* if they were concerned and call 112 if the response was negative.

The second phase of awareness raising took place in the summer of 2022 with the *"Have Fun" (Góða skemmtun)* campaign focusing on events, festivals and partying throughout the country to encourage *"good fun"* without violence. The public was encouraged to be aware of what was going on around them and to call 112 if someone needed help. Training was also provided to employees of bars and night clubs on how best to ensure the safety of guests.

The third phase of the awareness raising took place in the run-up to Christmas 2022, focusing on partying and events in the weeks prior to Christmas. The public was encouraged to have fun but to remember that having fun means that everyone should be safe from sexual violence and harassment. People were also informed that if they had concerns about sexual violence or harassment they should contact 112.

#### **Awareness campaign against sexual violence directed at men**

The awareness campaign *"Don't be that guy" (Ekki vera þessi gaur)* was launched in December 2021. The awareness raising was aimed at men between the ages of 18-35 and, among other things, was aimed at increasing awareness of unsuitable attitudes and where the boundaries lie in interaction with others. The campaign was intended to spotlight attitudes towards sexual offences and also to point out that sexual violence starts earlier than many people think. At the same time, the campaign was aimed at countering the demonising of perpetrators and opening up discussion of unacceptable attitudes in men's relationships with women.

#### **Awareness raising against domestic violence**

The awareness-raising campaign *"Tell someone" (Segðu frá)* began in October 2020. The public was encouraged to report domestic violence and seek help from 112. Persons who visited the website during the campaign were often seeking information on psychological violence. Among the most read content on the site was material designed especially for young people.

#### **There is HOPE (þú átt VON)**

The main focus of the Directorate of Equality's project *"There is HOPE"* is to share best practices that have proven successful in combating violence in close relationships, to form connections between parties, offer education and raise awareness among Icelanders. The awareness raising emphasises showing victims of violence in close relationships that there is hope of a better life. The experience of victims and perpetrators in exiting such situations end with the support of professionals is highlighted and a diverse variety of services offered.

### **3.2 Actions to benefit victims**

- Appropriations to law enforcement in connection with sexual offences and gender-based violence were increased by ISK 200 million in the budget for 2022. The number of full-time positions for investigating sexual offences was increased by 12, and work processes in the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police were revised with the aim of speeding up proceedings.

- A service portal for victims of sexual violence was opened in December 2021, as a digital service area in the police and prosecution data system. The objective of the service portal is to improve information disclosure to victims and defendants.
- The violence portal of the website 112.is now provides information about what the victim can expect when the case is handled in the justice system.
- The government has funded three full-time positions for experts in domestic violence cases (two social workers and one psychologist) to assist victims of domestic violence from all over Iceland.
- Victims of sexual violence have been guaranteed psychological support after questioning by the police. This is in collaboration with the trauma team of the psychiatric department of the National University Hospital (LSH), and all police departments in the country will offer victims of sexual offences follow-up interviews. Victims of sexual violence will be referred to LSH's trauma team for a follow-up interview. The team's services will not be limited to the follow-up interview, but instead are adapted to the needs of each individual. During the interview, the need for ongoing support and processing for each person will be assessed, including treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Work has been underway on the development of electronic risk assessment on-site for domestic violence among relatives and connected persons that will be connected to the LÖKE police records system in co-operation with the National Commissioner of Police and the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police.
- The Development Centre for Primary Healthcare in Iceland has prepared educational material and issued a new procedure for healthcare personnel regarding the reception of victims of sexual violence, on the one hand, and educational material for victims, on the other. The Development Centre is carrying out this project in collaboration with the project manager of the emergency reception for victims of sexual violence at the National University Hospital in Fossvogur.

### 3.2.1 Grants to resources for victims

#### **Aflið**

A three-year contract has been concluded with Aflið, an organisation for victims of sexual violence in the town of Akureyri. The contract provides annual funding of ISK 18 million in 2022-2024, for the following projects: counselling and support for victims of violence; the operation of a branch in East Iceland; increased services for persons of foreign origin; work for the executive council and board of Bjarmahlíð, a centre for victims of violence in North Iceland; support for a Women's Shelter in North Iceland; education on prevention; creation of promotional materials; operation and project management.

### **Bjarmahlíð**

This service centre for victims of violence opened in Akureyri in April 2019 in collaboration with the government. The service centre is a forum for co-operation between public bodies and non-governmental organisations that assist victims of violence. The service centre offers integrated services and counselling for adults who have been subjected to violence of any kind. Victims are given the opportunity to receive support and counselling free of charge after being subjected to violence. The government has provided the project with annual financial support since 2019. In addition, Bjarmahlíð received a grant of ISK 2.5 million in 2021 to shorten waiting lists by introducing digital technology and the use of communication apps enabling services for persons reflecting their residence, age, origin or disability.

### **Bjarkarhlíð**

The operational basis for Bjarkarhlíð was permanently secured from 2019 onwards with an annual financial contribution from the government. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour concluded an agreement with Bjarkarhlíð for a permanent financial contribution of ISK 20 million annually and also provided an additional ISK 15 million annually from 2019.

In 2021, Bjarkarhlíð received a grant of ISK 2.5 million in 2021 to shorten waiting lists by introducing digital technology and the use of communication apps enabling services for persons reflecting their residence, age, origin or disability.

Since 2020, Bjarkarhlíð has received an annual grant of ISK 3 million to operate a response team for human trafficking cases, which is convened when human trafficking cases arise or when such cases are suspected.

At the beginning of 2023, Bjarkarhlíð launched a pilot project providing services to victims of violence in West Iceland and the West Fjords, with financial support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour amounting to ISK 6 million.

### **Women's Counselling**

The Ministry of Justice granted the Women's Counselling a grant to provide legal advice to victims of gender-based violence in January 2023. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has also supported its activities.

### **Women's Shelter**

The NGO has received an annual budget appropriation from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in recent years, most recently ISK 85.6 million in 2023.

### **Sigurhæðir**

Since it began operation, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has provided annual support for the activities of Sigurhæðir, which is run by the Soroptimist Club of South Iceland and is a service resource for women living in the south of the country who have experienced violence. They are offered co-ordinated advice, support and treatment.

### Stígamót

Stígamót, a centre for survivors of sexual violence, has received an annual budget appropriation from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. In addition, the organisation received the following grants:

- In 2023, a grant of ISK 1.5 million was awarded for its activities.
- In 2021-2023, the Prime Minister's Office provided an ISK 12 million grant annually for the project *"Sick Talk" (Sjúktspjall)*.
- In 2022, a grant of almost ISK 5 million was awarded for projects to mobilise men in combating violence and for analysis of Stígamót data on perpetrators of violence.
- In 2021, a grant of ISK 10 million was provided to strengthen services for young people and shorten waiting lists of victims of gender-based and sexual violence.
- In 2021, a grant of ISK 15 million was awarded to services for young people and to shorten the waiting list of victims of gender-based and sexual violence arising from the increased pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Other grants

- Grants of ISK 18 million were provided to those police districts which are directly involved in victim centres. The grants are intended to further develop interdisciplinary co-operation against violence and reduce the likelihood of repeat offences of gender-based violence.
- The Prime Minister's Office supported NGOs providing assistance for victims of violence in the run-up to Christmas 2022. The institutions or organisations in question were Bjarkarhlíð, Bjarmahlíð, the Women's Shelter, Rótin (an advocacy group for non-binary people)/Konukot (a shelter for homeless women), Sigurhæðir and Stígamót, each of which received ISK 1 million, for a total of ISK 6 million.

## 3.2.2 Reports and analysis

### Report on Co-ordinated Healthcare Services for Children who are Victims of Sexual Violence

A [Report on Co-ordinated Healthcare Services for Children who are Victims of Sexual Violence](#) was published in October 2023. The Minister of Health has approved proposals in the report on the introduction of procedures for forensic examinations and sampling and for the establishment of a working group tasked with mapping the arrangements for healthcare services for children who live with violence of any kind and clarifying the future vision of healthcare services in the field.

### **Report on Arrangements for Healthcare Services in connection with Violence**

A [Report on Arrangements for Services in Connection with Violence with recommendations](#) was published in March 2023. The report assesses what legal and regulatory changes are needed for services in connection with violence, taking into consideration provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

### **Analysis of service centres for victims of violence**

A report on an [Analysis of Service Centres](#) for victims of violence was published in June 2023. The main conclusions of the analysis are that there is a need for both financial and systemic support from the government to ensure the operation of victim centres in the future, including possibly adopting specific legislation on service centres for victims of violence, defining and promoting support services for victims of violence, revising legislation on local authorities' social services and formulating harmonised rules for partners and guidelines for professionals.

### **Report of the State Prosecutor's Working Group on the processing time for sexual offences**

The [report](#) was published in August 2022. Its aim was to examine those sexual offence cases with a lengthy processing time to see which aspects most delayed the processing of the cases and whether and how the procedure could be altered and improved, and the processing time thereby shortened. The report made proposals for improvements including caring for employees working on cases of sexual offences, prioritisation of cases, the use of remote conferencing equipment for questioning and harmonised recording in the police records system countrywide.

### **Report on Co-ordinated Healthcare Services in connection with Sexual Violence**

A [Report on Co-ordinated Healthcare Services in connection with Sexual Violence](#) was published in December 2022. It contains, among other things, proposals for procedures, standardised registration forms and the development of educational material for healthcare practitioners on the reception of victims. Work is underway on implementing them.

### **Healthcare service procedure for reception of victims of domestic violence**

A [report](#) on the procedure of healthcare services for reception of victims of domestic violence was published in August 2021. The report contains recommendations for the procedure, ideas for educational materials, a standardised registration form for forensic examinations etc. The procedure is focused on the reception of adult victims of domestic violence. Subsequently

work began on the development and introduction of a uniform procedure in domestic violence cases, which has now been included in LSH's quality document, and work is underway on implementing it. Funding has been provided for the set-up of digital instructions and a registration form for forensic examinations.

### 3.3 Resources for perpetrators

#### Heimilisfriður

The government has provided annual support for Heimilisfriður, a treatment centre for individuals who use violence in close relationships. At the beginning of 2023, the contract with the centre was renewed. In 2020 and 2021, Heimilisfriður received a total of ISK 15 million in additional funding in order to respond to the increased demand for its treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Take the Step

Since 2021, the government has provided support each year for the programme "Take the Step", which offers specialised psychological treatment for individuals who have demonstrated harmful sexual behaviour or are concerned about their sexual conduct online or towards other persons.

The organisation has also received funding to provide appropriate support to defendants in sexual offence cases following their questioning by the police.

#### Information on the website 112.is

Information for perpetrators and/or defendants in cases of sexual violence has been added to the violence portal 112.is on ways to stop using violence and on the handling of cases by the justice system. Special mention is made of the resources "Take the Step", Heimilisfriður and the Red Cross helpline.

### 3.4 Actions in response to the COVID-19 epidemic

#### 3.4.1 Action Team on Violence and its actions

An Action Team on Violence was established in 2020 for the purpose of directing and co-ordinating work on the implementation of measures against violence in times of economic hardship and trauma. The team's work was focused mainly on general awareness raising about violence against children and domestic violence and on strengthening services and support resources for victims of violence.

When commencing its work, the action team put forward seven main proposals, all of which have been set in motion:

- the National Agency for Children and Families was expanded and provided with additional funding to meet the increased need for services and eliminate the waiting list that had developed;
- the emergency hotline 112 was strengthened and developed to enable people to seek assistance in connection with domestic violence and violence



against children. See further discussion below about the violence portal of the hotline;

- access by residents in rural areas to services in connection with domestic violence has been improved and to this end support was provided for a pilot Women's Shelter in Akureyri in August 2020. The project is still in operation;
- increased support was provided to children in vulnerable situations, with greater emphasis on their protection. The Reykjavík Metropolitan Police received a grant to devote special efforts towards children and young people in vulnerable situations, the experience of which was very positive;
- a pilot project was established which involves strengthening and developing co-operation between District Commissioners, the police, social services and child protection authorities in matters concerning the welfare and well-being of children, with special emphasis on protecting children who live with or have experienced domestic violence;
- the National Commissioner of Police was entrusted with conducting an assessment and analysis of violence against the elderly and disabled in order to provide them with better protection against violent crime. A report on violence against disabled people was published in January 2021 and a report on violence against the elderly was published in March 2021. The reports included recommendations for actions to improve the situation of the elderly and the disabled against violent crime;
- grants totalling ISK 25 million were provided to projects involving actions against violence, with an emphasis on collaboration between NGOs and public bodies, see discussion on p. 19.

#### **Actions and pilot projects based on recommendations of the Action Team on Violence**

- The District Commissioner in Vestmannaeyjar manages a pilot project focusing on reinforcing and developing co-operation between District Commissioners, the police, social services and child protection authorities in matters concerning the welfare of children, with emphasis on protecting children who have experienced domestic violence. In the autumn months of 2020, a workshop was held in the Westman Islands for professionals from child protection, social services, representatives of District Commissioners and police throughout Iceland on how to harmonise work processes. The project resulted in a variety of products, including the establishment of a formal consultation forum based on a declaration of co-operation between the District Commissioner, the police and the municipality, and the creation of a common procedure for sharing of information in connection with suspicion of child abuse. At the national level, the project has been a model for the development of regional consultation on crime prevention in other police departments.
- Taboo (Tabú), a feminist disability movement that focuses on multiple forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, organised peer education

in 2021-2022. The aim was to increase awareness of people's rights, self-comprehension and respect for their bodies. Emphasis was placed on inequality and different manifestations of violence and how to seek help if participants feel that they have experienced violence or their rights have been violated;

- Tabú assisted the Centre for Police Training and Professional Development in preparing educational material for the police. The Centre for Police Training and Professional Development has held courses for active police officers on how violence is manifest in the lives of people with disabilities. The aim of the courses is to give professionals in the field of law enforcement dealing with the disabled a deeper understanding of the history of people with disabilities and how violence in the lives of people with disabilities is sometimes manifest in ways different from non-disabled people.
- Tabú and 112.is produced educational videos about violence against disabled people that are available on the 112.is website.
- The State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre offers the course All About Love (*Allt um ástina*) for youth with neurodevelopmental abnormalities aged 15-20. This is a course on prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and harassment;
- The treatment remedy *Keep Safe* received a grant to prepare courses and present the remedy, developed for boys aged 12-17 who have developmental abnormalities, to child protection committees.

### 3.4.2 Grants in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

- In September 2023, grants of ISK 60 million were awarded to six projects aimed at ensuring access to support and counselling for victims and perpetrators of violence everywhere in Iceland. The projects that received funding were:
  - the Women's Shelter, for a Women's Shelter in Akureyri;
  - the Women's Shelter, for education and visibility work;
  - the National Commissioner of Police and local authorities in the Suðurnes region, for regional consultation
  - on combating violence and crime in Suðurnes;
  - the Soroptimist Club of South Iceland (for Sigurhæðir), for the training of Sigurhæðir's staff in a trauma-oriented approach based on EMDR methodology;
  - Women's Counselling, for legal advice;
  - Bjarkarhlíð, for services to victims of violence using the "ASSYST" methodology.
- In the autumn of 2021, grants of ISK 62.2 million were awarded to projects aimed at ensuring that victims, relatives and perpetrators of violence had access to diverse routes to seek help and subsequently receive appropriate services and support. The projects that received funding were:

- a web version of Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for trauma;
- education on parenting skills aimed at reducing the likelihood of neglect, abuse and violence against children;
- digitalised work processes to improve the procedures and reactions of health workers in connection with domestic violence on the healthcare portal Heilsuvera, at the Developmental Centre for Primary Healthcare in Iceland and in the medical records system; education was provided and educational materials made available to healthcare personnel. In addition, a link was set up to Heilsuvera's online chat on the violence portal 112.is.
- In the summer of 2020 a total of ISK 25 million was granted to NGOs and public agencies for 17 projects, all aimed at promoting general awareness of violence against children and domestic violence, improving services and support measures in connection with violence, and supporting the development and implementation of other projects in this field during COVID-19. The grants were awarded based on the recommendation of the Action Team on Violence.
- The Women's Shelter received a grant of ISK 100 million in 2020 in connection with the organisation's halfway house and new building.
- Stígamót received a grant of ISK 20.5 million in 2020 to shorten the waiting list for an interview and strengthen the organisation's services due to the increased demand for the organisation's services during the epidemic.
- The National Agency for Children and Families received a grant in the amount of ISK 35 million in 2020 to shorten its list and reinforce its activities.

## 3.5 Other government actions

### 3.5.1 The hotline 112 electronic portal on violence

The emergency hotline 112 has been strengthened and the website 112.is developed to serve as a web portal regarding domestic violence, sexual violence, digital violence, violence against children and other forms of violence, through which victims, relatives and perpetrators can find information and resources to stop the violence.

The 112.is website has a special area for children and teenagers, with education about violence and instructions on what to do if children and teenagers are exposed to or witness violence.

Guides on the justice system, how it works and how a case progresses under the system are available on the violence portal 112.is for victims of sexual violence. There are three guides: 1) for persons 18 years of age and older, 2) for young people aged 15-17 years and 3) for children 14 years of age or younger. Videos ("Stories") explain the main resources for victims of sexual violence, showing people how to get to them and helping them to overcome the obstacle of entering an unfamiliar situation to seek help.

Information for perpetrators and/or defendants in cases of sexual violence has been added to the violence portal 112.is on ways to stop using violence and on the handling of cases by the justice system. Special mention is made of "*Take the Step*", Heimilisfriður and the 1717 helpline.

The violence portal 112.is has been strengthened to further improve online access for people of foreign origin and with disabilities. The information is in Icelandic, English and Polish. Work is underway to set up automatic translation of the information and to add easy-to-read text and content.

### **3.5.2 Projects related to schools and youth**

#### **Communication consultant**

A communication consultant for sports and youth affairs began work in 2020 and the work has subsequently been reinforced with additional funding. The role of the communication consultant for sports and youth affairs is, among other things, to guide individuals who turn to the consultant in connection with incidents or misdeeds that have occurred in organised sports and youth activities concerning, for example, bullying, violence, gender-based or sexual harassment. The consultant also provides sports and youth clubs with prevention education in this field.

The communication consultant for sports and youth affairs received a grant of ISK 8 million in 2022 in response to increased demand for services.

In 2022 the communications consultant published a harmonised response plan for violence, bullying and accidents for sports and youth activities. Furthermore, checklists and guidelines were prepared for the recruitment of staff and volunteers in sports and youth activities.

#### **Sexan (The S\*x)**

The short film competition Sexan was held during the City of Reykjavík's Sexual Health Week (Week 6) in February 2023. The event encouraged 7th grade youngsters to make their own short film on boundaries and consent, as well as on the origin, manifestations and consequences of digital violence. The event is to be repeated in February 2024. Sexan was organised by the emergency hotline in collaboration with the police, the City of Reykjavík, the National Association of Local Authorities, the Directorate of Equality, Icelandic National Broadcasting (RÚV), the National Agency for Children and Families, the Directorate of Health, the Media Committee and the Directorate of Education.

#### **Career development for compulsory school teachers – gender and equality instruction**

The Icelandic Teachers' Union held a course for compulsory school teachers on practical equality instruction and gender studies teaching in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2020. Among other things, it discussed gender roles and stereotypes, gender-based study and career choices,

manifestations of gender-based violence and gender-based harassment, power discrimination that breeds prejudice against women, harmful images of masculinity and pornography use among young people.

#### **Awakening campaign for safe and positive use of digital and new media**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has concluded an agreement with SAFT, Society, Family and Technology, which is an awareness campaign for the safe and positive use of computers and new media by children and adolescents in Iceland. The project is part of the cyber security aspect of European Union's Connecting Europe facility. The party contracting with the EU is *Heimili og skóli* (Home and School-, the national association of parents, which is responsible for the implementation and execution of the project in formal collaboration with the Red Cross, the National Commissioner of Police and Save the Children Iceland (*Barnaheill*). The SAFT project, part of the EU's cyber security programme, has done extensive awareness work on digital citizenship and has recently focused on digital violence especially.

#### **The course Gender-based Violence: prevention and education**

The course Gender-based Violence: prevention and education was offered as part of Menntaflétta in both 2022 and 2023. Menntaflétta is a course for teachers, staff of leisure activities and other education professionals. The course examines critically society's accepted ideas about equality and violence. The course has two objectives: firstly, to increase participants' understanding of gender-based violence and its manifestations in society; and secondly, to improve the ability of participants to lead discussion of, work with social attitudes on and deal with issues related to gender-based violence that may arise in the work place.

#### **Targeted instruction on sexual health and violence prevention in compulsory and secondary schools**

A [Report](#) on targeted instruction on sexual health and violence prevention in compulsory and secondary schools was published in June 2021. The report's recommendations concern both the framework and implementation of sex education as well as how its success should be monitored.

### **3.5.3 Labour market actions**

In February 2023, Occupational Safety and Health launched a new campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace under the title #TökumHöndumSaman (Let's join hands). The campaign consisted of television advertising and the development of educational materials and tools. The objective is to encourage workplaces to take action through prevention, education and targeted responses.

New educational material and practical tools to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace were developed and are available on the website of Occupational Safety and Health. These include educational videos on the manifestations and consequences of sexual harassment and a checklist for the handling of cases

involving bullying, sexual and gender-based harassment, and violence. The campaign was prepared based on [proposals of the Action Group against Bullying, Sexual Harassment, Gender-based Harassment and Violence in the Workplace](#), which were published in June 2021. An agreement was concluded with Occupational Safety and Health for funding of ISK 71.2 million to follow-up on the recommendations.

## 4. International Agreements and Conventions

### **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN Convention on Women)**

Iceland is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, sometimes referred to as the *UN Convention on Women*.

[Iceland's Ninth Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women \(CEDAW\)](#) The report was discussed at a meeting of the United Nations Women's Committee in Geneva in May 2023. The report discusses how Iceland has fulfilled its obligations under the Convention and how these efforts have followed the recommendations issued by the Women's Committee following the last report.

### **Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**

Iceland is a signatory of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), which is the first binding agreement that comprehensively deals with the struggle to combat violence against women and domestic violence. It provides for the rights of victims and the obligations of public authorities to protect and assist women who are subject to violence; to educate the public, the government and professionals; to take preventive actions against violence; and to offer remedies and treatment to perpetrators.

In the autumn of 2021, the Icelandic government published a [Report on the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention](#) in Iceland. The report lists the committee's recommendations on how to improve the implementation of the Convention.

The first assessment by GREVIO, the monitoring committee for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, in Iceland concluded in November 2022 with the committee's status report on the implementation of the Convention in Iceland.

The Icelandic government has responded to the committee's recommendations, in part by amending the Act on Healthcare Practitioners, following which healthcare practitioners can now report domestic violence to the police at the victim's request. Working groups have also been set up to examine the provision of services to victims of violence and the implementation of the Convention.

## 5. Other Projects

### 5.1 International co-operation

#### **The Nordic Council of Ministers on Gender Equality and LGBTQ Issues**

Iceland led the Nordic Council of Ministers on Gender Equality and LGBTQ issues in 2019 and 2023. In its presidency programme for 2019, Iceland emphasised, among other things, violence against women and its social consequences in light of the #metoo movement. It was also decided to fund a three-year research project on sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, which is intended to underpin the Council's future strategy in the field of gender equality. Iceland's presidency program for 2023 focused on transgender and intersex people, as well as continuing work to respond to setbacks in gender and LGBTQ issues that have occurred in the Nordic countries and globally.

#### **Iceland's Presidency of the Council of Europe**

From November 2022 to May 2023 Iceland held the presidency of the Council of Europe. During its presidency, the Icelandic government focused specifically on gender equality and the rights of LGBTQ people. Special emphasis was placed on combating gender-based violence online and the importance of engaging men and boys in advancing gender equality. Iceland's permanent representation in Strasbourg organised several events for this purpose, on the role of men and boys in the struggle against gender-based violence, on cyber-violence, and on progressive legislation on the rights of LGBTQ people based on Iceland's recent legislation on gender autonomy. Iceland also played a major role in the adoption of a resolution on the role and responsibility of men and boys in ending gender-based violence against women and girls.

#### **Generation Equality**

Generation Equality is UN Women's global equality initiative, which began in 2020 and is led by six action coalitions that focus on different issues. Iceland leads an action coalition on gender-based violence. [Iceland's obligations](#) in the initiative are 23 in number; they aim at eradicating gender-based violence through increased prevention, improving consultation on anti-violence measures and strengthening services and support resources for both victims and perpetrators.

### 5.2 Conferences on sexual and gender-based violence

#### **National Consultation Forum against violence**

A National Consultation Forum against violence took place in November 2022 at the Grand Hótel in Reykjavík and was also live-streamed. The objective of the meeting was to give representatives of the state, local authorities, NGOs, research institutes and others concerned with these issues the opportunity to confer and



compare activities, present innovations and research results, and make recommendations for improvement with the aim of reducing and preventing violence. The main themes of the meeting were violence among children and young people and multidisciplinary consultation against domestic violence, sexual violence and gender-based violence. After the addresses, workshops were held at the Grand Hótel, the University of Akureyri and the Search and Rescue Centre in Selfoss.

### **Meeting on actions against sexual violence in secondary schools**

The Ministry of Education and Children and the Icelandic Secondary Students Union (SÍF), held a well-attended discussion meeting with staff, school administrators and secondary school students in October 2022 on actions against sexual violence in secondary schools under the title "*Responses and the Will to Change*". The aim of the meeting was to respond to a call for clearer procedures regarding bullying, sexual and gender-based harassment, and violence in secondary schools.

### **Reykjavík Dialogue**

International women's organisations combating sexual and gender-based violence and harassment held a global conference in the Reykjavík concert hall and convention centre Harpa 16-18 August 2021, under the heading Reykjavík Dialogue, *Renewing Activism to End Violence against Women*. On International Women's Day, 8 March, in 2020, the Icelandic government agreed to provide support for the conference.

### **International Conference on Online Sexual Offences against Children**

An international conference on online sexual offences against children online took place at Reykjavík University in December 2019. The conference was organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the University of Reykjavík in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the State Prosecutor, the Reykjavík Metropolitan Police and the Centre for Police Training and Professional Development.

### **International #metoo conference**

An international conference on the impact of the #metoo wave was held in Harpa in the autumn of 2019. Some 80 lecturers took part and almost 800 people attended, making it one of the most extensive conferences ever held on the impact of #metoo. The conference was part of the programme of the Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers and was organised in collaboration with RIKK, the Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference, at the University of Iceland. The conference examined #metoo in an international perspective and sought to analyse why the wave reached the heights it did in 2017 and why the impact varied in different social groups, communities and countries. The lessons to be learned from #metoo were also examined with respect to multiple

discrimination, such as in connection with gender, ethnicity, class, religion, origin, age, disability and sexual orientation.

