



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the first part (public)* of the 2752nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 15 August 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Amir

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[CERD/C/SR.2752/Add.1](#).

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The public part of the meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined twenty-first to twenty-third periodic reports of Iceland (continued)
([CERD/C/ISL/21-23](#); [CERD/C/ISL/Q/21-23](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iceland took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland), said that his Government had not appeared before the Committee, and other treaty bodies, for quite some time as a direct consequence of serious resource problems. Given the size of his administration, the submission of reports was a considerable undertaking. However, he was confident that Iceland would be in a position to comply with its reporting obligations in the future.
3. While civil society had not participated fully in the drafting of the periodic report, the Government was making efforts to engage more actively with civil society with a view to its full involvement in the drafting of future reports. An interministerial steering committee on human rights had been established in 2017 to increase cooperation and coordination on human rights issues. It would in future be involved in the drafting of the report and the follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations.
4. The principle of equality before the law was enshrined in article 65 of the Icelandic Constitution. That provision had been added to the Constitution following a revision process, the preparatory work for which specifically mentioned the Convention. In 2018, Iceland had adopted an Act on equal treatment in employment and an Act on equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic origin. Those two Acts, along with article 65 of the Constitution, constituted comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.
5. It should be noted that there was no indigenous population in Iceland.
6. While there were reports of some Roma people settling in Iceland, the delegation was not aware of any allegations of human rights violations against that community. A Romani Studies Conference was being organized at the University of Iceland, with a focus on the anthropology and history of the Roma community, including the Nazi genocide of Roma.
7. There were very few people of African descent living in Iceland. However, those who had settled in the country did sometimes experience racial discrimination. Several awareness-raising campaigns had been implemented with a view to combating racial discrimination, including against people of African descent. Every year, the Human Rights Centre organized a celebration of the European Action Week Against Racism.
8. In 2018, following a study of stateless persons in Iceland, the Icelandic Nationality Act had been amended to bring it into line with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Government aimed to ratify those two instruments by the end of 2019. Thus, the Icelandic legislation on statelessness was in line with best practices.
9. He wished to stress that there had never been an organization against Polish people in Iceland, but merely an online group. That group had been present on an online platform that had since been closed down. To his knowledge, no such group or organization currently existed in Iceland.
10. **Ms. Alfredsdóttir** (Iceland) said that the aim of the action plan on immigration 2016–2019 was to ensure equal opportunities for all. Under national legislation, a new action plan would be submitted to Parliament every four years. The action plan focused on society, family, education, the labour market and refugees. As part of the action plan, a survey on attitudes towards immigrants and multiculturalism had been undertaken. The survey found general attitudes to be positive, with 67 per cent of respondents stating that there should be more or the same number of immigrants living in Iceland.

11. Seminars on immigrant issues had been held for social workers, nurses, teachers and police officers. Research on the housing situation of immigrants had shown that they were no more likely to be on the waiting list for social housing than Icelandic nationals. The Government had sought cooperation with sports clubs and made available information in various languages in order to encourage children and young people of immigrant origin to participate in group sporting and leisure activities.

12. The Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Women's Shelter and the Human Rights Centre had launched a project entitled "Know your rights, knowledge is power". The project aimed to educate immigrant women who had suffered domestic violence about the social assistance and legal remedies available to them. Seminars would be held and information materials would be provided. The project would be implemented with the cooperation of relevant government departments and non-governmental organizations.

13. Analysis conducted by Statistics Iceland had shown that, between 2007 and 2018, the earnings of immigrants had been on average 8 per cent lower than those of Icelandic nationals. The equal pay standard had entered into force on 1 January 2018, under which employers of 25 or more staff were required to establish salaries in line with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, regardless of gender or background.

14. The number of people receiving international protection in Iceland had increased from 12 in 2012 to 289 in 2018. One of the aims of the action plan on immigration was to improve the reception of refugees. A committee had been appointed by the Minister of Social Affairs to make suggestions regarding a resettlement programme for refugees. The committee had suggested that refugees and municipal authorities could take part in a resettlement programme on a voluntary basis, with the municipal authorities providing housing for the refugees concerned.

15. The municipal authorities would be responsible for providing all the necessary services for the refugees and establishing plans for each individual that included educational or employment objectives. Social services would continue to monitor the situation of all refugees, even after they had found employment. The Directorate of Labour would provide Icelandic lessons, cultural guidance and assistance with employment. The Multicultural Centre would pair refugees with municipalities on the basis of the resources available and provide training and support to those municipalities. The Ministry of Social Affairs was making the necessary preparations for the implementation of the resettlement programme. Refugees who did not want to take part in the programme would still be offered Icelandic lessons and cultural guidance, as well as any other assistance offered to residents of Iceland. In 2017, an agreement had been concluded between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Icelandic Red Cross with a view to providing assistance to all refugees.

16. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that the responsibility for resettling refugees was shared between the national Government and the municipal authorities, with the Government shouldering the greater part of the financial burden.

17. Iceland did not issue unconditional work permits to workers upon arrival. Rather, the Directorate of Labour verified that the conditions stipulated in a worker's contract of employment were in line with legislation and collective agreements before issuing such a permit. That system protected workers from discrimination. Since 2017, all foreign nationals with permanent residence permits had been exempt from the obligation to hold a work permit.

18. The unemployment rate of foreign nationals was higher than that of Icelandic citizens. Measures had been taken to redress that balance, including Icelandic language classes and vocational skills training programmes. The Directorate of Labour participated in European Union projects that aimed to provide women with the necessary skills to succeed in the labour market. In Iceland, the unemployment rate among women was slightly higher than among men. It was important to remember that, given the small size of the population, such statistics could be affected by a relatively small event, such as one company filing for bankruptcy.

19. **Ms. Gísladóttir** (Iceland) said that the Ministry of Justice had issued a new action plan on human trafficking in March 2019. Relevant stakeholders had been consulted on the content of the plan, which focused on awareness-raising, education and institutional knowledge. The four main pillars of the plan were prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships. The Ministry of Justice was overseeing the implementation of the action plan by means of monitoring meetings, the first of which had been held in May 2019.

20. The measures to be implemented included: a review of the relevant legislation, regulations and administrative directives; assistance and protection for victims; and guidelines on identifying and protecting child victims. Those measures would improve the institutional knowledge of law enforcement officials with regard to investigations, prosecutions and cooperation with foreign law enforcement agencies. The Action Plan emphasized the importance of statistics and reporting information on human trafficking was mandatory.

21. The 2018 review of Iceland by the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings and the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings had been taken into account during the drafting of the action plan. In 2019, a second Family Justice Centre had been established, which offered assistance and services to potential victims of human trafficking. Under the action plan, a national referral mechanism would be established by 2020 to coordinate responses to suspected cases of human trafficking. The mechanism would also be involved in awareness-raising and preventive actions.

22. From 2015 to March 2019, the police had been notified of 74 cases of possible human trafficking, of which 27 had been formally investigated. In the same time period, there had been 88 confirmed victims of human trafficking. There had been only one conviction for human trafficking in Iceland, which had taken place in 2010. The action plan aimed to improve the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences by increasing the number of police officers and providing additional funding for specialized training. Additional funding had been provided to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the police force in order to strengthen investigations and prosecutions of sexual offences, including those involving human trafficking.

23. Extra funding had been allocated to the police in the 2019–2023 budget so as to increase its capacity to combat money-laundering and organized crime and deal with other challenges related to the growth of the tourism industry. A special unit for asylum seekers had been set up within the Metropolitan Police. All asylum seekers were obliged to have contact with that unit, whose staff had expertise in many aspects of human trafficking. Innovative approaches were also being employed, such as collaboration between business owners, city authorities and the police to improve security at night, and the launch of a project to identify victims of organized crime who had been made to work in hotels. The Metropolitan police, together with the tax authorities and the Directorate of Labour, had carried out unannounced visits to places of work to look for victims of human trafficking.

24. Victims and suspected victims of human trafficking received social and financial assistance, health care and secure housing from the State based on individual assessments of their needs. An ad hoc team of specialists was formed in each case to work with the suspected victim. In 2018, four women had received support and secure housing thanks to an agreement concluded between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the women's shelter in Reykjavik. Twenty-five men suspected of being victims of labour trafficking had been provided with financial assistance and secure housing since 2017. The Ministry of Social Affairs had a contract with the Human Rights Centre to provide free legal aid to suspected victims, who were also provided with work permits on request.

25. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that, while the State had supported a number of victims of human trafficking in recent years, it had not been successful in convicting the perpetrators. People in dire circumstances received help even when it was highly questionable whether their situation fell under the criminal definition of trafficking in human beings. Nevertheless, the Government was placing great emphasis on improving police investigations in cases of suspected human trafficking in order to facilitate the task of prosecutors.

26. **Ms. Lyngdorf** (Iceland) said that the 2018 annual report of the women's shelter in Reykjavik stated that 35 per cent of the women seeking its services on account of domestic violence were foreigners. However, that high figure did not necessarily mean that migrant women suffered more violence in intimate relationships than Icelandic women. It was likely that foreign women merely had a greater need for State support in such situations, since they had fewer relatives and friends on whom to rely in Iceland.

27. A cross-ministerial steering group on coherent action against sexual violence had been tasked with ensuring the implementation of the recently ratified Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) as well as responding to the revelations of the #MeToo movement. The steering group paid particular attention to the multiple discrimination faced by migrant women. An international conference on the impact of the #MeToo movement in Iceland was to be held in September 2019 as part of the Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Among the main topics would be what #MeToo revealed about the intersections of gender, sex, race, class, religion, ethnicity, age, disability and sexualities. A special plenary session would focus on migration, race, class, and the vulnerable situations of women with insecure immigration status and women in precarious and low-paid jobs.

28. Funding had been allocated to the Human Rights Centre and the women's shelter to carry out an information and empowerment programme for foreign women. Special reception centres for victims of violence were operational in Reykjavik and Akureyri, providing all necessary support under one roof. A comprehensive pamphlet on the Icelandic justice system and Icelandic society was available in seven languages: Arabic, English, French, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Thai. Government-funded projects focused on providing practical support to migrant women and conducting research into the situation of migrant women in order to understand the main barriers they faced. The national action plan against violence for the years 2019–2022 provided for preventive measures, awareness-raising, education, improved procedures within the justice system and increased support for victims of violence. The authorities had supported a number of outreach activities by non-governmental organizations that aimed to reach migrant women in vulnerable situations.

29. **Mr. Thórsson** (Iceland) said that the Sustainable Development Goals had been fully integrated into Government policies on social, economic and environmental affairs. The Government was devoting particular attention to identifying and better serving marginalized groups in society. The promotion of human rights for all – regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation – was a cornerstone of the Government's international and domestic priorities.

30. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland was fortunate enough to have one of the lowest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world. However, owing to its small population size, significant fluctuations could be caused by just one or two cases. Over the last 10 years, the average infant mortality rate had been 1.8 per 1,000 births. Although the rate had risen slightly in 2017, it had fallen to 1.7 per 1,000 births in 2018, which indicated that no upward trend was occurring.

31. The Multicultural Centre, based in Ísafjörður, was mandated by law to provide migrants with information about their rights and obligations in Iceland. It also provided the Government, institutions, municipalities, enterprises and associations with advice and information in relation to migrant affairs, and monitored developments in society by gathering, analysing and sharing information. As of 1 August 2019, the Centre had also had a presence in the capital. The main responsibilities of the staff member working in Reykjavik related to the needs of refugees.

32. **Mr. Bossuyt** said that the rather sharp increase in the number of asylum applications received by the State party, from 35 in 2009 to over 1,000 in 2017, had probably had a noticeable impact given the small size of the overall population. It would be useful to know the recognition rate of Georgian and Albanian asylum seekers, which were the two most represented nationalities. He wished to know whether the State party had an effective repatriation policy for those who were refused refugee status, and what policy the Government was pursuing in respect of the increase in applications for asylum.

33. **Ms. Shepherd** said that the State party was to be applauded for having implemented policies to counter racism and cauterize the emergence of anti-African attitudes in a country in which the presence of black Africans was rather recent. She wished to clarify that all United Nations Member States were expected to launch the International Decade for People of African Descent and select relevant programmes and activities for implementation. Even States in which anti-African attitudes were not evident had a responsibility to raise awareness about the fact that, globally, people of African descent were one of the most marginalized groups. The delegation might find it useful to consult general recommendation No. 34 on racial discrimination against people of African descent, and should also be aware that the Committee was drafting a general recommendation No. 36 on preventing and combating racial profiling.

34. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that the increase in the number of asylum seekers in Iceland had indeed presented a challenge for the Government. The geographical location of Iceland meant that very few people reached it directly from a country where they were being persecuted. Most came from mainland Europe, having travelled to Western Europe. A large percentage of the asylum seekers who had arrived in 2016 and 2017 were citizens of European countries who had already attempted to claim asylum in another European country. Their situations were such that asylum recognition rates in Iceland were relatively low, at roughly 20 per cent. However, beyond the high numbers of people coming from Albania and Georgia, Iceland had also seen an increase in asylum seekers from much more troubled countries, such as Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Government's policy was to process applications as quickly and efficiently as possible to ensure that those in need of international protection received it in the correct manner in Iceland.

35. **Mr. Avtonomov** said that the State party's efforts to improve criminal investigations and prosecutions were welcome, as it was necessary to impose strict penalties to deter such criminal activity. He wished to know whether the State party had any plans to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), since, in many cases, domestic workers came from other countries and were therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

36. **Mr. Diaby** said that the State party had not seen the same rise in far-right ideology and rhetoric that had been observed in many other European countries. He would welcome comments from the delegation about how Islamophobia, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance were being kept out of Icelandic politics. It would be useful to know how many campaigns the Government had launched to raise awareness about such issues, and whether the delegation considered them to have been effective.

37. **Ms. Alfreðsdóttir** (Iceland) said that she would provide written information as regards the status of consideration by the Government of the ratification of International Labour Organization Convention No. 189 on domestic workers.

38. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that he could not really provide an answer as to why political parties of the far right were not succeeding in gaining popularity in Iceland unlike in other European countries. A possible reason might be that Iceland was a couple of decades behind other European countries in terms of the number of immigrants within the country.

39. **Ms. Alfreðsdóttir** (Iceland) said that immigration was a recent phenomenon for Iceland and it was therefore not yet experiencing the same backlash against that phenomenon as in other European countries. However, the Government viewed its present situation as a perfect opportunity to learn from other countries as a means of avoiding the rise of the far right in Iceland.

40. **Mr. Murillo Martínez** said that he would be interested to find out whether Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2 on the eradication of poverty and hunger were a priority for the State party. There was often an overlap between the issues of poverty, hunger, migration, racism and extremism, so that a broader vision of social issues was required in order to tackle those problems. He asked whether the Government had conducted surveys on the public perception of racism in Iceland and how it anticipated the development of its future demographic situation, given its small population and the fact that only 20 per cent of its land surface was inhabited. He invited the delegation to comment on

how the State party was using sport to tackle issues of racial discrimination and on whether racial profiling was a matter of concern to the Government in view of the upcoming general comment to be released by the Committee.

41. **Ms. Mohamed** said that she would like to know whether constitutional courts existed in Iceland to address complaints of human rights violations and whether general courts were competent to act in the event that a law was in contravention of the Constitution.

42. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that there were no constitutional courts in Iceland but the general courts were fully equipped and mandated to judge whether an individual law was in line with the Constitution and with international human right laws and treaties to which Iceland was a party.

43. **Mr. Thórsson** (Iceland) said that the overarching goal of development programmes initiated by the Government was to eliminate poverty and hunger in accordance with Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2. For instance, the United Nations (UN) University Fisheries Training Programme, among others, had been set up to target those specific issues. Such programmes had been running for a number of years and had produced positive results.

44. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland was sparsely populated but it was not government policy to attempt to increase the population. A large proportion of the national territory was composed of glaciers and highlands which were practically uninhabitable.

45. **Ms. Alfredsdóttir** (Iceland) said that a survey had been conducted on public attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism. The Government was pleased with the results as they had indicated that the general attitudes were positive. Moreover, those who enjoyed a close personal relationship with immigrants had a more positive view of immigration. When asked whether Iceland should increase or decrease the rate of immigration, 31 per cent had responded in favour of an increase, 30 per cent were in favour of maintaining the current situation and 34 per cent were in favour of a decrease in immigration. However, the results suggested that the public was aware of the positive impact that immigration had on the economy. Iceland had one of the highest participation rates of immigrants in its labour market among member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

46. The Government was aware of the positive role that sport could play in combating discrimination. To that end, a football programme had been launched in cooperation with The Unity of Faiths Foundation (TUFF) to assist children from disadvantaged backgrounds and particularly to help immigrant children integrate into the community. The project had been launched initially in the Breidholt district of Reykjavik, which had the highest concentration of immigrants, and had subsequently been extended to other areas. Under the programme, children were taught about hate speech and the importance of equal opportunity.

47. **Mr. Bossuyt** thanked the delegation for the fruitful interactive dialogue and for their willingness to learn from the best practices of other countries. He hoped that the delegation would appear before the Committee more regularly.

48. **Mr. Gudmundsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland was fully committed to equality and counted on the support of the Committee in achieving that goal.

The public part of the meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.