



## Democracy & Welfare Society

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# Rights and Freedoms in a Democratic Society

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- Iceland is a republic and a democratic state. The Republic was founded on June 17, 1944.
- A republic means that the power is held by the people. Citizens will vote for representatives in parliament (Alþingi) as well as municipal representatives. These representatives belong to different political parties.
- Parliamentary elections are held every four years.
- The nation's president is also selected for a four-year term by popular vote.
- Elections are decided by popular majority.
- It is nevertheless important for the government majority to consider the will of the minority when forming policies, e.g., in parliament and the municipalities.



# Rights and Freedoms in a Democratic Society - continued

- Every citizen over the age of 18 has the right to vote in Iceland.
- An individual must have Icelandic citizenship to be able to vote in parliamentary elections.
- To vote in municipal elections, foreign nationals must have been domiciled in Iceland for five years consecutively leading up to the date of the election.
- Power is separated into three branches of government: Legislative, executive and judicial.

# The United Nations Charter

- The United Nations Charter was signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945. This was the first international treaty with the specific aim of maintaining and protecting human rights around the world.
- Iceland signed the charter in 1946.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed on 10 December 1948.
- It includes the following: Everyone is born free and equal. Everyone has the same rights regardless of colour, race, sex, language, creed, religion, or other beliefs.

# From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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- Everyone is born free and equal. Everyone has the same rights regardless of colour, race, sex, language, creed, religion, or other beliefs.
- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude, no one can sell or purchase another human being.
- Everyone has the right to just and favourable remuneration. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.
- Everyone has duties to the community and fellow citizens.
- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.
- Everyone has the right to a nationality and no one shall be deprived of their nationality.

# European Court of Human Rights

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- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was established in 1959 based on the European Convention on Human Rights. Iceland signed the convention in 1950 and it was committed to law in Iceland in 1994.
- The convention covers the right to life and liberty; the right to a fair and public hearing; ban against torture; the right to privacy; and the freedom of expression, religion, and association.
- Many specific human rights are protected by international treaties and by Icelandic law, as well as by the Icelandic constitution.

# Hate Speech

- Hate Speech is any kind of words, images, or other forms of communication which disseminates or instigates hatred against an individual or individuals that belongs to a specific group.
- Hate speech is hurtful and can have serious consequences for individuals and groups.
- According to the Icelandic penal code, public hate speech is understood as any hateful or discriminatory language against individuals or groups based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender identity, or sexuality, and is punishable by financial penalties or up to 2 years in prison.



# Prejudice

- Prejudices are those judgements people make when only one side of an issue has been explored or when something is judged in advance.
- Prejudices are often formed by ignorance or fear of new or alien things which people are exposed to in the media or society.
- Both those who are already living within the community and those who join a new community may experience prejudices.
- By increasing the participation and visibility of different people in as many stages of life as possible it is possible to broaden people's understanding and reduce prejudice.
- It is healthy for everyone to look inward and see if they can detect prejudices when seeing or experiencing something new or novel. Then it can be good to delve deeper, seek out information, and ask questions.



# Press

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- Everyone has access to media and social media.
- It is important to remember that not everything you see online is true or correct.
- It is good to use the official websites of public entities in Iceland to obtain accurate information, ex. [www.covid.is](http://www.covid.is), [www.vedur.is](http://www.vedur.is), [www.island.is](http://www.island.is)
- One way of becoming a more active participant in a society one has recently joined is to follow the local news. Practising Icelandic is also useful.
- At [www.ruv.is](http://www.ruv.is) and through the state TV channel it is possible to see news and access a lot of content for children and adult, some of it with Icelandic subtitles. RÚV is a government institution.
- [www.grapevine.is](http://www.grapevine.is) is a news outlet in English and it has news and content relating to Icelandic society. Many other news media are popular among the general public in Iceland.

# Equality

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- When discussing equality what is often being referred to are the equal rights of men and women. Nowadays, what is usually being referred to is equality in a broader sense and it is often known as "equal treatment": Everyone should enjoy the same rights and opportunities, regardless of age, origin, physical ability, gender, faith, or sexuality.
- Equality means, among other things, that people have the same opportunities to influence and contribute to society, that they share in the responsibilities and benefits of society, and that no one should have to fear abuse or violence.



Mynd frá VMST

# Freedom of Speech

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- Freedom of Speech means that everyone is free to express their opinions about politics, religious beliefs, and other issues without fearing persecution.
- Freedom of speech applies to persons, radio, TV, newspapers, and social media.
- However, it is illegal to engage in libel or hate speech or discriminate against people in public discourse, both in speech and writing.



# Legal Protection

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- Citizens of Iceland enjoy legal protection. This means, among other things, that:
  - No one can be sentenced to prison without a fair trial. This means that the case is tried in court with legal representation and that an independent panel of judges decide whether the accused is guilty. Following the verdict, a penalty is decided.
- People can be held in custody while the police is investigating the case. A judge must arbitrate on the issue of custody.
- Everyone with the status of a defendant has the right to legal advice during interrogations.
- A person who submits a report to a court and does not speak Icelandic well enough has the right to an interpreter at the prosecution's expense.



# Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Association

- Freedom of religion is the freedom of individuals to choose which religion they want to belong to or to belong to no religious organisation. There is religious freedom in Iceland, but the national church is Evangelical-Lutheran. The State Church is the biggest, the Catholic church is the second biggest, and there are several other active religious organisations.
- No one may be forced to join or leave a religious organization.
- The most important factors to consider about the freedom of association are:
  - The right to belong to a political party or organisation without having to fear persecution or arrest.
  - The right to belong to a trade union without having to fear persecution or arrest.
  - The right to express one's opinions through legal protest.

# Human Rights and Counseling Offices

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- The Icelandic Human Rights Office operates locally. The office is an independent institution that works towards issues such as the promotion of human rights.
- The office also has a supervisory function about the status of human rights in Iceland. They provide legal counsel to immigrants.
- The City of Reykjavík operates a Human Rights and Democracy Office that is responsible for implementing the city's human rights policy.
- The Multicultural and Information Centre er offers phone consultation through 450 3090 and a dynamic information website with information available in several languages, [www.mcc.is](http://www.mcc.is)

# Welfare System

- In Iceland, there is a so-called welfare system that covers crucial aspects of daily life, including quality of life, education, and health services, and this system is financed through the tax system.
- In a welfare state, the state and municipalities allocate funds to ensure that all residents can enjoy a basic necessities of life such as housing, food, medical care, and education. This is all based on the contributions working people make by paying taxes.
- Individuals also accumulate benefits for themselves and are entitled to leave and can receive unemployment benefits and sickness benefits if they lose their job or are injured.
- If people are ill for a long time, it is possible to apply for sickness benefits to the Icelandic Health Insurance (Sjúkratryggingar Íslands) or for a rehabilitation pension to the State Social Security Institute (Tryggingastofnun ríkisins). Disability pension is intended for individuals aged 18 to 67 who are unable to work full time due to reduced working capacity. Those who are 65 years and older, and have lived in Iceland for at least three years, are entitled to an old-age pension.



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# The State and Municipalities

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- The Icelandic government is responsible for the country's finances, foreign policy, judicial matters, and elections to name a few things. The government shapes policies in most aspects of Icelandic society, such as economic affairs, public security, education, health, nature conservation, human rights, science, and innovation.
- There are just over 70 municipalities and each one contains several towns and villages. The municipalities are responsible for things such as:
  - The operation of kindergartens, primary schools, and leisure activities for children
  - Offering education and assistance for families in difficulties, and provide the ability for people to, for example, apply for temporary financial assistance to the municipality and receive assistance, as long as certain conditions are met
  - Offering services and living arrangements for senior citizens and disabled people.
  - Managing garbage collection, swimming pools, libraries, sports halls, public transport, planning, and much more



# Directorate of Labour

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- The Directorate of Labour (Vinnumálastofnun) is responsible for assisting people who have become unemployed and are seeking employment. There, people can apply for unemployment benefits and receive counselling for work and education.
- Those on unemployment benefits must always be active in their job search, and be ready to participate in labor market measures, for example by taking mandatory courses such as Icelandic language courses.
- At the Maternity/Paternity Leave Fund, expectant parents can apply for maternity/paternity leave. The amount of support that parents receive depends on whether people have been fully employed and the remuneration of that job. Students and those who are not fully employed can apply for a maternity/paternity allowance.



# Websites

[www.althingi.is](http://www.althingi.is)

[www.asatru.is](http://www.asatru.is)

[www.bahai.is](http://www.bahai.is)

[www.catholica.is](http://www.catholica.is)

[www.covid.is](http://www.covid.is)

[www.dv.is](http://www.dv.is)

[www.facebook.com/foundationoficeland/](http://www.facebook.com/foundationoficeland/) -

[www.faedingarorlof.is](http://www.faedingarorlof.is)

[www.grapevine.is](http://www.grapevine.is)

[www.humanrights.is](http://www.humanrights.is)

[www.island.is](http://www.island.is)

[www.kirkjan.is](http://www.kirkjan.is)

[www.mbl.is](http://www.mbl.is)

[www.mcc.is](http://www.mcc.is)

[www.monitor.is](http://www.monitor.is)

[www.reykjavik.is/mannrettindi](http://www.reykjavik.is/mannrettindi)

[www.ruv.is](http://www.ruv.is)

[www.sjukra.is](http://www.sjukra.is)

<https://island.is/s/syslumenn> [www.skra.is](http://www.skra.is)

[www.tr.is](http://www.tr.is)

[www.vedur.is](http://www.vedur.is)

[www.visir.is](http://www.visir.is)

[www.vmst.is](http://www.vmst.is)



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