



Position Paper – Iceland’s Commitment to Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Delegation: Republic of Iceland

Committee: UN Women

Introduction

Iceland is a small country with a strong voice in the global movement for gender equality. For over a decade, we have consistently ranked first in the Global Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum. In 2023, Iceland had closed more than 91% of its overall gender gap. These results did not come by chance, but through years of deliberate political, social, and legal efforts.

As a country, we believe that women’s rights are human rights. And we also believe that youth – especially young women – must be at the center of today’s decisions about equality and justice. Young people bring new ideas and challenge old norms. If we want a future that is more equal, we must start by listening to them, supporting their ideas, and giving them real opportunities to lead.

1. Youth’s Role in Advancing Gender Equality

In Iceland, youth are not only seen as future leaders, but as partners in the present. The National Youth Council and local youth parliaments give young people formal roles in shaping policy, including on gender issues. Over 70% of young Icelanders participate in some form of civic or community action, according to 2022 data from Statistics Iceland.

Gender equality is also taught in Icelandic schools—not as an optional topic, but as a key part of citizenship education. Students learn about equal rights, respectful relationships, and the importance of inclusion. These lessons help create a culture where fairness is expected, not debated.

We encourage all countries to treat youth as real participants in the fight for gender equality—not just as observers.

2. Youth-led Work Against Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects women and girls in every part of the world. The World Health Organization reports that around one in three women globally has faced physical or sexual violence. Iceland takes this issue seriously, and believes that youth can be powerful allies in prevention efforts.

In recent years, Iceland has supported student-led initiatives to raise awareness about GBV. Campaigns in high schools and universities—many run by youth—focus on topics like consent, bystander intervention, and online safety. Programs such as *HeForShe in Schools* involve both young men and women in these conversations.

Organizations like *Blátt áfram* and *Stígamót* work closely with youth groups to provide education and support. These efforts are not only about protection—they are also about building trust, promoting empathy, and creating safe spaces where young people feel heard and respected.

We call on all member states to invest in youth-led anti-violence education and survivor support, especially in schools and community centers.

3. Supporting Young Women in Entrepreneurship and the Economy

While Iceland has made great progress in supporting women's participation in the workforce, we continue to focus on helping young women gain economic independence through entrepreneurship.

The *Women's Innovation Fund* provides grants to women-led businesses, and in 2023, over 60% of the applicants were under the age of 30. Many of these young entrepreneurs are working in tech, green energy, and creative industries. They bring fresh ideas, but often need help finding resources and networks to grow.

Programs like *Startup Reykjavík* have increased women's participation from just under 30% in 2015 to over 50% in recent years. But access to capital, mentorship, and markets is still not equal for everyone. That's why Iceland continues to support targeted training programs, microloans, and business accelerators specifically designed for young women.

We believe that if more countries invested in young women's economic potential, we would see stronger economies and more just societies.

4. Encouraging Women's Leadership Through Mentorship and Representation

Although Iceland is one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, we still recognize that political power is not yet equally shared globally. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, only 26.5% of all national legislators are women as of 2023. Young women are even less represented in leadership roles.

In Iceland, we try to change this through structured mentorship. The *Young Women in Politics* program pairs aspiring leaders with experienced parliamentarians. They attend workshops, learn how laws are made, and get hands-on experience in public speaking and campaigning. Since 2017, over 300 women have taken part in this program.

At the municipal level, local councils are required to include equal numbers of men and women. Young women in these councils often go on to national roles. Mentorship is not just about teaching skills—it's about building confidence and creating networks.

We encourage all nations to create similar mentorship programs to ensure that young women not only participate in politics, but thrive in it.

Conclusion

Iceland's commitment to women's rights is not just a national policy—it's a principle that shapes our actions at home and abroad. We are proud of the progress we have made, but we also know there is still work to be done. Gender equality is not a destination, but an ongoing effort that requires constant attention, learning, and courage.

Youth are essential in this journey. By supporting young people—especially young women—we can create societies that are fairer, safer, and more inclusive.

We call on all countries to recognize the power of youth, support their leadership, and work together to build a future where every girl and woman can live free, equal, and empowered.

References

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Ecrin Erdoğan