

Joint ECE/UNDP Workshop on  
on Gender Statistics for Policy Monitoring and Benchmarking  
(Orvieto, Italy, 9-10 October 2000)

ICELAND

COUNTRY REPORT - USERS

Papers submitted by Iceland<sup>1</sup>

The Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men from May 2000 (Act 96/2000) has the aim to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equality in all spheres of the society. All individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and to develop their skills irrespective of gender. The new Act brings about some changes in the institutional mechanisms but the organization now is as follows:

**The Minister of Social Affairs** is in charge of the Implementation of the Act.

A special institution **The Equal Status Bureau** for which the Minister is responsible sees to the administration and monitoring of the implementation. **The Complaints Committee on Equal Status** appointed by the Minister has the role of considering and issuing its opinion on cases where the violation of the law is in question. The Committees opinion shall not be subject to appeals to a higher authority. **The Equal Status Council** of nine members appointed by the Minister after nomination from different organizations (NGOs, employers and labour unions) shall make systematic efforts to equalize the status and the right of women and men in the labour market especially but may also attend to other spheres of the society. Local authorities are regularly to appoint **equal status committees** in their communities whose role is to consult, monitor and initiate specific measures for furthering the equal status of women and men. Each ministry shall appoint an

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**equality coordinator** who is to monitor activities in matters of equality of the ministry and its institutions.

The objectives of the Icelandic authorities in gender equality are set forth in a **four-year plan of action for gender equality**. The existing plan is for the years 1998-2000. A report on the status of activities so far is being prepared.

The plan of action's format is such that each governmental minister undertakes to work on certain projects under the umbrella of his/her ministry, as well as working on projects, which the government decides to be jointly carried out.

### **Gender issues and concerns**

One of the gender issues much debated in recent years concerns parental leave after birth of a child and the need for fathers to become more involved. A new Act on parental leave was passed by Althingi in May 2000. According to the Act each parent has a 3 months independent right to a paid parental leave and besides the parents have a further right to 3 months leave which they can share between them. The general rule is that a parent in employment receives 80% of his/her total earnings while on parental leave. This is considered a big step forward.

### **National policies**

The guideline of the government's **plan of action** is for the views of gender equality being integrated into all factors of policy formulation, decisions and measures by the state within four years (1998-2001). The focus is on the formal or legal equality in the daily lives and work of both sexes. Additionally, it is pointed out that the equal rights and status of women and men cannot be ensured through governmental measures alone, i.e., solidarity is necessary between nongovernmental organization (NGOs), the news media, and the employers and labor unions alike. The governments main issues in this plan of action:

#### **All statistics gender based**

The governmental ministries and the state institutions will receive a circular introducing a decision by the government to the effect that all statistical information and reports (regarding individuals) will be specified by gender. The Statistics Iceland will collaborate with the state institutions on the execution of this project. The Office for Gender Equality (now the Equal Status Bureau) will study the progress of this project two years after the government's action plan takes effect.

#### **A study will be made on whether public policy formulation is based on gender equality**

The government will appoint a committee to study whether and how public policy formulation is based on gender equality. At the beginning of its work, the committee will present its frame of work to the government and make proposals on the categories of issues to be specially studied. The

committee will launch its work no later than by May 1, 1998. The progress of the committee will then be evaluated and reviewed one year later.

### **Gender equality at state institutions**

The management achievement agreement between the ministries and the state institutions will refer in particular to Art. 6 of the Act on The Rights and Duties of Civil Servants, which addresses gender equality, among other things. Additionally, the letters of appointment of the managers of state institutions will emphasize the requirement for the promotion of gender equality in the relevant institutions' operation.

### **Women and economic affairs – women and economic power**

A committee will be appointed to present a proposal on a research project regarding the economic power of women and men, and on where such power is embedded in the Icelandic society.

### **The projects of individual governmental ministries**

Each ministry, has agreed to conduct a study on the status of women and men who work in the relevant ministry or its institutions, and will prepare plans on improvements in areas where they are deemed as needed. Furthermore, each ministry has agreed on special measures to balance the percentage of the sexes on the ministry's committees, boards and councils.

Special projects include a project launched in 1998 on increasing the participation of women in politics, a project on women and power, which includes a research project on the power of women and men and where they lie in society, and a project concerning gender equality in school, aimed against students becoming entrapped in the path of conventional division of duties between the gender. The program also focuses on education for the heads of state institutions and the ministries on gender equality and gender equality programs.

**The Prime Ministers Office** is responsible for the execution of the government's projects, cf. the above section.

**The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs** is responsible for projects on violence against women and courses on the human rights of women.

Among projects which **the Ministry of Social Affairs** is responsible for are gender equality evaluation, education on gender equality, increasing the political participation of women, allocation of funds for strengthening employment in the rural district, women refugees, relations between professional and family lives, experimental project on job evaluation, women in search of jobs, treatment for men exercising violence against women and a study on treatment programs for drug addicts.

**The Ministry of Finance** is responsible for regulations regarding recruitment and wage decisions and review of forms.

**The Ministry of Health and Social Security** has responsibility for the committee on future policy in health affairs, review of the standard statistics on social security, special campaign of preventive measures against narcotic and tobacco usage, regulations regarding research of pharmaceutical products and last but not least a major project on women's health in general.

**The Ministries of Industry and Commerce**

Among projects which the Ministries of Industry and Commerce is responsible for are support for women's entrepreneurship, study of the status of women in industry, increasing the number of women in business administration and operation and support by the New Business Venture Fund in strengthening women's employment.

**The Ministry of Agriculture** will promote full consideration being shown for the position of rural women and women farmers in all of the special target projects carried out under this plan of action and which concern the status of women on the labor market, and the opportunities entailed in their own enterprises and re-education.

**The Ministry of Education** is responsible for projects involving grants for education about gender equality, the Library of the History of Icelandic Women, Women and the news media – women's and men's images and working towards equality and against conventional work division.

Among projects for which **the Ministry of Fisheries** is responsible are one on women in fish processing and another on women and entrepreneurship in the fishing industry.

**The Ministry for the Environment** has appointed an equal status committee consisting of representatives from the institutions that fall under the ministry's umbrella.

**The Ministry for Foreign Affairs**

Among projects for which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is responsible is one on women and men working with international institutions and another on human rights violations against women and girls.

**The role of gender statistics**

The aim of the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men shall be reached by the following:

- a. Gender mainstreaming in all spheres of the society
- b. Working on the equal influence of women and men in decision making and policy making in the society
- c. Enabling both women and men to reconcile their occupation and family obligations
- d. Improving especially the status of women and increasing their opportunities in the society
- e. Increasing education in matter of equality

- f. **Analysing statistics according to sex**
- g. Increasing research in gender studies

Gender statistics are thus one of the main pillars of the Act. The article 21 of the Act is as follows: In the production of official statistics on individuals and in interview and opinion surveys information should be collected, compiled, analysed and presented by gender unless specific circumstances such as protection of privacy speak against it”.

### **Gender statistics and indicators needed**

Referring to the aim of the Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, which is to promote gender equality in all spheres of the society all official statistical needs are to be gender based. Indicators on gender equality are to be found in all activities of the society.

### **Comments and Co-operation**

Gender based data for most of the relevant issues are normally available and easily accessible. The publication *Women and men in Iceland* (Statistics Iceland 1997) has been widely used both in policymaking and to follow the trends as well as other sources of information.

### **Comments on the overall**

Gender statistics are one of the most important bases for all policy- and plan-making regarding gender equality.

### **Comments on what is felt**

There is need for guidance in the use of gender statistics. It is important to know what to ask for and how to interpret different matters in terms of the statistics. How can gender statistics be of more use in policy-making? It is important to use appropriate ways to reach those concerned with information and thus the presentation of statistics is of importance too. There may be a need for developing new ways for this.

It would be convenient if the ECE/website had information listed by the main categories ECE is working on within the field of gender statistics.