WIP Study Trip to Iceland

Summary Report

3 & 4 April 2014
Althingi, Parliament of Iceland
Reykjavik
Iceland
INTRODUCTION

The Women in Parliaments Global Forum (WIP) met in Iceland from 3 to 4 April 2014 in the occasion of the first WIP Study Trip.

International female Parliamentarians, coming from more than 20 countries, gathered in Reykjavík for a 2-days Study Trip organized by WIP. The event was held in cooperation with the Parliament of Iceland, which for the first time opened its plenary for a conference of an international group of female Parliamentarians.

Participants had the chance to meet with the President, the Prime Minister, Members of the Government and Members of the Parliament of Iceland. The WIP Study Trip gave participants first hand insights into Icelandic society, built on the values of gender equality and female social, economic and political empowerment.
ICELAND: THE SUCCESS OF LEGISLATION

The WIP Study Trip to Iceland brought the spirit of the Women in Parliaments Global Forum (WIP) to the country with the best performance in gender equality in the world. Participants coming from more than 20 countries gained fantastic insights into Iceland’s path to gender equality and took home new ideas about women’s political empowerment and leadership which will now reach citizens all around the world.

It was a pleasure to discovering the Icelandic society and grasping what it takes to be the country leader in gender equality. Grassroots movements, a common understanding on the ability and responsibility of everyone regardless their gender and a solid legislation on social and family affairs, have shaped the society of today. No country can afford leaving behind women’s talent, and Iceland has succeeded in tapping the potential of all its citizens.

And indeed, if legislation is a tool for building up a society which gives equal chances to men and women, the need to get more women on board in politics is clear. The world cannot afford excluding the perspectives and opinions of half its population. Therefore, increasing the number of female MPs will lead to more balanced, sustainable and future oriented legislation. It will have widespread social and economic benefits.

The Women in Parliaments Global Forum is particularly thankful to:

- All the participants of this first Study Trip for travelling from all parts of the world to meet us in Reykjavík.
- The Parliament of Iceland for welcoming us and providing a forum for new impressions to take back to our countries.
- The Ministers Eygló Harðardóttir, Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir and Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir, for sharing our dedication to foster women networks and advancing society through the empowerment of women.
- Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the first female Head of State and former President of Iceland, for paving the way for so many women leaders who follow your example.
- And Johanna Siguroardóttir, former Prime Minister of Iceland and WIP Advisory Board Member, for her continued support and input to our activities.
Please enjoy the reading of this report about the WIP Study Trip to Iceland and I hope you will soon join the Women in Parliament Global Forum at one of our next events or outreach campaigns. I look forward to seeing this network grow by connecting more and more female Parliamentarians around the world.

Join us in the spirit of advancing society.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin
Founder & CEO of the Women in Parliaments Global Forum (WIP)
WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM ICELAND’S EXPERIENCE?

The WIP Study Trip to Iceland was a successful learning exercise about the global leader in gender equality. International female Parliamentarians coming from more than 20 countries had the opportunity to meet the President, the Prime Minister, Members of the Government and Members of the Parliament of Iceland during the 2-days Study Trip in Reykjavik (3-4 April).

Three milestones in the history of Iceland were essentially mentioned during the Study Trip:

“Imagine that one quarter of your country’s population takes a day off; that happened here in 1975,” said Eygló Harðardóttir, Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, about the impact of the Women’s Strike (24 October 1975). More than 25,000 women took a day off to emphasize the importance of women’s contribution to the society. As a result the society as a whole came to a halt.

“I had the responsibility to prove that a woman could do it,” said the former President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, first female President democratically elected in Iceland and in the world (1980) who opened the way for many women around the world. President Vigdís received the “WIP Award for Lifetime Achievements in Female Political Empowerment” during the Study Trip.

“A new party made a difference for gender equality in Iceland, and this was the Women’s Alliance,” emphasized the former Speaker of the Parliament, Ásta Jóhannesdóttir about an all-women political party founded in 1983. This party succeeded in breaking the male dominance in politics in Iceland and increasing the female representation.

Today, 39.7% of the Icelandic MPs are women. Although this is one of the highest percentages in the world, the 2013’s elections are seen as a step back for the women political empowerment in Iceland (before the elections, 43% of the MPs were women). “A higher number of women in decision-making positions will not only change politics but it will change the world,” argued Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir, Minister of the Interior.
The Icelandic laws which have contributed to closing the gender gap in the country were widely discussed with the local politicians and the female CEOs of the companies Rio Tinto Alcan, Actavis, Steinunn and Lýsi. “Maybe not everything can be copied by other countries, but there are lessons that we can take away from Iceland,” defended Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir, Minister of Industry and Commerce, who hosted the visits to the local companies.

The Icelandic parental leave scheme was highlighted several times as one of the key legislations to advance in gender equality. The scheme consists of 9 months of paid parental leave: each parent has 3-months leave -not transferable- and they can divide other 3 months as they like. According to the Icelandic politicians, more women are in the labour market now because the risk of hiring a man or a woman is more equal.

“A lot of Icelanders have changed their minds about quotas in company boards,” said Ragnheiður Elín Árnadóttir. Iceland passed a new law that obligates companies to have a minimum of 40% of women or men in their boards in 2010. The impact of this legislation, which took effect on 1 September 2013, is the increase of women leaders in business.

Despite ranking number one in the WEF’s Global Gender Gap Report 2013, the Icelandic politicians stated that they are not yet there. “We need to break the glass ceiling over and over again,” said Katrin Juliusdottir, former Minister of Industry, who had twins during her mandate. Inequalities like the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap are some of the old new problems to be tackled during the next years; while monitoring the effect of the new legislations like the gender quotas in companies.
PRESIDENT VIGDÍS: “YOUR VOICE AND ACTIONS CAN AFFECT WOMEN’S LIVES FOR THE BETTER”

The former President of Iceland, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, received the WIP Award for Lifetime Achievements in Female Political Empowerment on 4 April 2014 in Reykjavík. “I am so proud of my Icelanders. They did it; I didn’t do it” stressed the first woman elected Head of State in the world, during her acceptance speech. “Your voice and actions can affect women’s lives for the better” she added, addressing the group of international female Parliamentarians.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was the fourth President of the Republic of Iceland. Elected for the first time in 1980 she stepped down in 1996, after four consecutive terms in office.

“President Vigdís,” addressed on a first-name basis according to Icelandic tradition, continues to be active in public life and in the international community. She is the founding Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders and was nominated Goodwill-Ambassador of Languages of UNESCO in 1998 and UN Goodwill Ambassador in the fight against Racism and Xenophobia in 2000. The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages was established at the University of Iceland in 2001.

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir has received honorary doctorates from 18 universities in North America, Europe and Asia. Her lifetime achievements for Iceland, the Nordic countries, the preservation of nature and her efforts in the promotion of languages have been recognized with many international awards. She is an outstanding role model for Icelandic society and the political empowerment of women around the world.
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The following countries were represented at the WIP Study Trip to Iceland:

- Albania
- Bangladesh
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- France
- Germany
- Iceland
- Italy
- Jordan
- Kenya
- Latvia
- Malaysia
- México
- Moldova
- Pakistan
- Slovakia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tunisia
- United States
SPEAKERS

Vigdis Finnbogadóttir
First Female President of Iceland (1980-1996), First woman in the world to be elected Head of State

Einar K. Guðfinnsson
Speaker of the Parliament of Iceland

Eygló Harðardóttir
Minister of Social Affairs and Housing of Iceland

Jamshed M. Kazi
Director a.i., Oslo Governance Centre, UNDP

Rannveig Rist
CEO of Rio Tinto Alcan Iceland

Olafur Ragnar Grímsson
President of Iceland

Kristín Ástgeirsdóttir
Former Member of Parliament, Director of the Centre for Gender Equality, Iceland

Steinunn Sigurd
CEO of STEINUNN

Atifete Jahjaga
President of the Republic of Kosovo

Silvana Koch-Mehrin
Founder of the Women in Parliaments Global Forum

Birgitta Jónsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Pirate Party

Brynhildur Pétursdóttir
Member of Parliament, Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Group, Bright Future

Guðbjörg Edda Eggertsdóttir
CEO of Actavis

Sigrún Magnúsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group, Progressive Party

Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson
Prime Minister of Iceland

Katrín Pétursdóttir
CEO of LÝSI

Steinunn Magnúsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group, Progressive Party
Hulda Bjarnadóttir
Managing Director FKA, Association of Business Women in Iceland

Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir
Minister of the Interior of Iceland

Katrín Júlíusdóttir
Member of Parliament, Vice-Chairwoman of the Social Democratic Alliance

Björk Ölafsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Bright Future

Unnur Brá Konráðsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Independence Party

Svandís Svavarsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Left-Green Movement

Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir
Minister of the Interior of Iceland

Katrín Jakobsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Chairwoman of the Left-Green Movement, Iceland

Björk Ölafsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Bright Future

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir
Former Member of Parliament and Foreign Minister of Iceland, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women

Ana Gabriela Guevara Espinoza
Member of the Mexican Senate, Track Athlete, World Champion, Olympic Silver Medallist

Natalia Vicente Roldan
ICT Specialist, Winner InnoApps Award 2013

Svandís Svavarsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Left-Green Movement

Ragnheiður Eín Árnadóttir
Minister of Industry and Commerce, Iceland

Katrin Jakobsdottir
Member of Parliament, Chairwoman of the Left-Green Movement, Iceland

Jakob Kopperud
Head of Parliamentary Relations, the World Bank

Unnur Brá Konráðsdóttir
Member of Parliament, Independence Party

Frances Rosenbluth
Damon Wells Professor of Political Science, Yale University
Why would you encourage female MPs to attend the WIP Study Trip to Iceland?

I am very pleased that Iceland has been chosen as a destination for the first WIP Study Trip. It was not a coincidence that last year the country was at the top of the WEF’s Gender Gap Report for the 5th consecutive year, because this list is put together by weighing issues like political participation, economic equality and access to education and health care. But gender equality did not fall into our laps without a struggle and Iceland did not reach this stage overnight. This is something we have worked towards for decades and when we look back we see several milestones along the way: “The Women’s Strike” is definitely at the top of the list. The strike took place on the 24th of October 1975. The purpose was to put women’s contribution to society in the spotlight and show how undervalued their work was, both inside and outside the home. 90% of Icelandic women took part in the strike and refused to work, cook or look after children – and that day our society was almost brought to a standstill. This was the first women’s day off in history and it was a vital event in the fight for equal rights in Iceland. The Women’s Strike is also considered to have paved the way for the election of President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in 1980, the first woman in the world to be elected President in a democratic election.

Another event that came in the wake of The Women’s Strike was the founding of a women’s party in 1983. This party managed to get some women elected to Parliament and its influence reached the old political parties. They now had no choice but to heed this development and put more women in the forefront.

These 3 events were all a turning point for Icelandic women and played an important role in the fight for equal rights in my country, but all societies have something others can learn from. I hope that WIP Study Trips will become an on-going project that will allow women from all over the world to learn from each other’s experiences. I am in no doubt this will pave the way, slowly but surely, towards closing the gender gap on a global level.

Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir was the first female Prime Minister of Iceland (2009 - 2013). Her government pushed gender equality to the top of the political agenda, with initiatives such as gender budgeting and a nation-wide ban on strip clubs. Now honourable member of the WIP Advisory Board, she shared her insights in an interview just before the WIP Study Trip to Iceland.
Iceland is at the top of the WEF Gender Gap Report year after year. What kinds of policies were needed to tackle gender inequality?

First and foremost, determination and co-operation between women, similar to the forces at work at WIP today. You also need a completely new mind-set and an increased understanding among men. They have to realize that equal rights are not merely a “women’s issue”, they concern the whole of society. If a woman is treated badly in the labour market, for example if she is being badly paid, her entire family suffers. If welfare-issues are not high up on the agenda, then it becomes a huge social problem that harms children, the aged, the disabled and, thus, most of society. Welfare issues have to be addressed so that both parents can go out to work. Economic equality and a strong welfare-system are the keys to a better society and to equality in all spheres of life.

I would also like to mention few things that I consider very important tools to increase women’s participation in top level positions in society, both in the private and the public sector.

Firstly, fathers need to take parental leave as well as mothers. When we introduced a law to that effect in Iceland – giving fathers a separate right that could not be transferred to the mother – the percentage of men that took parental leave rose from less than half a per cent to 90 per cent. And due to this change employers could no longer use the excuse that it was more risky for them to hire young women of childbearing age for top positions than young men.

Secondly, Iceland has passed a law similar to a law in Norway that guarantees women a minimum of 40% of all seats on the boards of public and private companies. Before, women had occupied less than 10% of those seats. I remember that Icelandic business women were very suspicious of this new law and wanted businesses to make this change themselves, without being forced to. Now, however, these women agree that the legislation was indeed necessary. It is too early to come to any conclusions about the effect of this legislation, but it looks as if women’s numbers on public and private boards are growing too slowly. But we have to remember that this law only came into effect a few months ago.

“Fathers need to take parental leave as well as mothers”

I think this kind of legislation is something that WIP could propose as a global goal, the percentage of women on the boards of public and private companies are often very small, sometimes only 2-3%.

Thirdly, it is very important that those who are in power always view all issues and decisions through a gender-equality-lens. By doing that, my Government introduced a Budget that was put together with a “gender equality compass”. That is, all decisions presented in the Budget were made with equal rights in mind.
In your time as Prime Minister, your Cabinet was always gender-balanced, but you have also experienced Cabinets and Parliaments with a male majority. What would you say it changes when more women are indecision-making positions?

The Government that I led for over four years put gender issues very high on the agenda and we made progress. For the first time in Iceland’s history we reached gender equality in the Cabinet and for a while we even had a majority of female Government Ministers. It changes a lot to have a more equal balance between the sexes in the Cabinet.

I have personal experience of that as I was the only woman in Government for 7 years as Minister of Social affairs. With more women in Government issues are viewed from different standpoints, both issues regarding equal rights and, no less importantly, issues regarding spending cuts, taxation etc. which have a huge impact on the welfare system and equality in society as a whole. In my experience, women and men approach such issues differently – and my Government managed two very important things: To reverse the immense inequality that had become rooted in our society and ensure that Iceland became one of the most equal countries in the world at the end of my four years in power.

Your Government passed a law to shut down every strip club in the country. How was the debate within the Icelandic society over this issue?

It took approximately 10 years to get a law to ban prostitution, or, rather, paying for sexual favours. This was due to a lot of effort by the women’s movements of the political parties and also due to strong support from a group that fights sexual violence. Public opinion polls showed that the majority of the population wanted this law passed, as 70% wanted to ban prostitution. This was a very important legislation and stopping human trafficking was a key motivation behind this fight.

I am extremely pleased that the equal rights committee of the European Parliament is looking at this issue and that it has declared that paying for sex should be made illegal. So, there is positive development within the EP in this regard and it is vitally important that this work will be finalised.

What is the gender budgeting initiative?

There is no fixed item in the Budget to finance this, but the Ministries’ staff – especially the staff in the Finance Ministry – is responsible for gender budgeting and they have the task of estimating the impact of all Budget decisions on equal rights. That is what we call gender economics management. And a ministerial committee oversees the execution of equal rights issues. This committee is made up of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Home Affairs Minister and the Welfare Minister.

“It is very important that those who are in power always view all issues and decisions through a gender-equality-lens.”
During the WIP Annual Summit you defended that the economy collapse would have been different with more women in charge of the economy. What would have been different and why?

Many people have wondered whether Iceland would have been so badly hit if women had been in charge of the country's biggest financial institutions and major companies. Of course, we can never be absolutely certain if the economic collapse could have been completely avoided if women had been at the helm of these institutions and companies, but many factors indicate that this would have been the case. One of the indicators is that figures show that women generally tread more carefully than men in matters of finance. They show more responsibility and prudence and are less inclined to taking risks.

It is interesting that there were no female bank managers in the three major Icelandic banks that collapsed and caused most of the economic havoc in Iceland in 2008. Several smaller financial institutions also became bankrupt and not one of those was run by a woman. I wonder if that was a coincidence...

“Women show more responsibility and prudence and are less inclined to taking risks”
THURSDAY, 3 APRIL

09:00  Arrival and Registration
Parliament of Iceland, Althingi, Reykjavík, Iceland

Coffee/Tea

WELCOME MESSAGE

By Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (video), First Female President of Iceland (1980-1996),
First woman in the world to be elected as Head of State
By Atifete Jahjaga (video), President of the Republic of Kosovo

09:30  WELCOME WORDS
Plenary, Parliament of Iceland

By Einar K. Guðfinnsson, Speaker of the Parliament of Iceland
By Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Founder of the Women in Parliaments
Global Forum (WIP)

10:00  PLENARY DEBATE INCLUDING OPEN DISCUSSION WITH MEMBERS
OF THE ALTHINGI
Plenary, Parliament of Iceland

“What Does It Take to Become a Champion?”

For the last 5 years, Iceland has been ranked number 1 in the World Economic
Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report. It is considered a country which provides
the same opportunities for men and women in education, business and
politics. Today, Iceland has many women in leading positions in all parts of
society. They constitute role models for the younger generations, inspiring
them to take on leadership roles. The panel will address the policies that were
needed to tackle gender inequality in Iceland. The participants will have the
opportunity to share their national experiences and discuss other successful
cases of women’s empowerment.

Speakers:
Eygló Harðardóttir, Minister of Social Affairs and Housing of Iceland
Birgitta Jónsdóttir, Member of Parliament, Leader of the
Parliamentary Group of the Pirate Party
Jamshed M. Kazi, a.i., Director Oslo Governance Centre, UNDP

Moderator:
Brynhildur Pétursdóttir, Member of Parliament, Deputy Leader of
the Parliamentary Group, Bright Future
11:45  Lunch  
Restaurant of the Parliament of Iceland

13:00  Departure by bus  
Parliament of Iceland, Althingi, Reykjavík, Iceland

13:30  FIELD VISIT 1 - RIOTINTO ALCAN ICELAND - ALUMINIUM SMELTER  
Straumsvik, Hafnarfjörður
Meeting and Discussion with Ms Rannveig Rist,  
CEO of Rio Tinto Alcan Iceland  
Further information: www.riotintoalcan.is

15:00  FIELD VISIT 2 - ACTAVIS - PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY  
Reykjavíkurvegi 76-78, 220 Hafnarfjórður
Meeting and Discussion with Ms Guðbjörg Edda Eggertsdóttir,  
CEO of Actavis  
Further information: www.actavis.is

17:00  RECEPTION BY ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON, PRESIDENT OF ICELAND  
Bessastaðir, Presidential Residence

18:00  Return to hotel by bus

19:20  Departure from hotel by bus

19:30  RECEPTION BY SIGMUNDUR DAVID GUNNLAUGSSON, PRIME MINISTER OF ICELAND  
Harpa Concert Hall, Austurbakki 2, Reykjavík Harbour

20:00  WELCOME DINNER AT HARPA CONCERT HALL  
Harpa Concert Hall, Austurbakki 2, Reykjavík Harbour
Speaker:  
Kristín Æstgeirsdóttir, former MP for the Women’s Alliance, Director of the Center for Gender Equality, Iceland

22:30  Return to hotel by bus
FRIDAY, 4 APRIL

09:00  Departure by bus
       From Hilton Reykjavík Nordica Hotel

09:15  FIELD VISIT 3 - LÝSI - FISH OIL COMPANY
       Fiskislóð 5-9, Reykjavík
       Meeting and Discussion with Ms Katrín Pétursdóttir, CEO of LÝSI
       Further information: www.lysi.is

11:00  FIELD VISIT 4 - STEINUNN – FASHION LABEL
       Grandagarður 17, Reykjavík, www.steinunn.com
       Meeting and Discussion with Ms Steinunn Sigurd, CEO of Steinunn

12:15  Lunch, Vikin Maritime Museum
       Grandagarður 8, Reykjavik Harbour

       Speakers:
       Sigrún Magnúsdóttir, Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group, Progressive Party
       Hulda Bjarnadóttir, Managing Director, FKA - Association of Business Women

13:30  Bus transfer to the Parliament

14:00  PLENARY DEBATE
       Plenary, Parliament of Iceland

       “ELIMINATING GENDER STEREOTYPES”

       Girls love pink and princesses, boys prefer blue and Batman - gender stereotypes kick in early. What are the tools to overcome those patterns? Iceland’s Gender Equality Act (2008) aims to establish and maintain gender equality in all spheres of society. This includes changing traditional gender images and working against negative stereotypes regarding the roles of women and men. What can other countries learn from Iceland to overcome stereotypic thinking about the roles of women and men in society? What has been the experience of eliminating gender stereotypes in other countries, societies and businesses?

       Speakers:
       Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir, Minister of the Interior of Iceland
       Katrín Júlíusdóttir, Member of Parliament, Vice-Chairwoman of the Social Democratic Alliance
       Björk Ólafsdóttir, Member of Parliament, Bright Future
Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, former Member of Parliament and Foreign Minister of Iceland, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, UN Women
Ana Gabriela Guevara Espinoza, Member of the Mexican Senate, Former Track Athlete, World Champion, Olympic Silver Medalist
Natalia Vicente Roldan, ICT Specialist, Winner InnoApps Award 2013

Moderator:
Svandís Svavarsdóttir, Member of Parliament, Leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Left-Green Movement

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 CLOSING SESSION - EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS
Plenary, Parliament of Iceland

“LESSONS LEARNT - CAN ICELAND BE EXPORTED?”

Iceland is the world’s champion in closing the gender gap. Can the Icelandic experiences be transformed into concrete tools for adapting the success story to other countries? Is legislation the key to improving the situation? Or are general social norms determining factors in changing attitudes towards Gender Equality in a society? What can and what cannot be “exported” from Iceland’s success story?

Speakers:
Ragnheiður Elin Árnadóttir, Minister of Industry and Commerce, Iceland
Katrin Jakobsdottir, Member of Parliament, Chairwoman of the Left-Green Movement, Iceland
Jakob Kopperud, Head of Parliamentary Relations, the World Bank
Frances Rosenbluth, Damon Wells Professor of Political Science, Yale University

Moderator:
Unnur Brá Konráðsdóttir, Member of Parliament, Independence Party

17:00 Return to hotel by bus

18:30 WIP AWARD CEREMONY FOR “LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS IN FEMALE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT”
to Vigdis Finnbogadottir, First Female President of Iceland (1980-1996), First woman in the world to be elected Head of State
Dining Hall, 2nd floor, Hilton Reykjavik Nordica Hotel

Introduction to the WIP Campaign on the International Day of the Girl Child, possibility to sign the Girl Declaration.
ICELAND: FACTS & FIGURES

- **Iceland is the world’s global leader in gender equality (WEF, 2009–2013).**
  For the past five years, Iceland has topped the rankings of the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report. The score is based on good results in terms of political empowerment and educational attainment and on improvements in women’s economic participation.

- **Iceland approved equal inheritance rights for men and women in 1850.**
  In 1850 women gained the same inheritance rights as men; until then daughters only had the right to one third of the inheritance.

- **The female suffrage was introduced in Iceland in 1915.**
  Women gained the right to hold local office in 1908. The same year, four women were elected to the city council in Reykjavik. Following this success in the local elections, women over the age of 40 gained the same rights in national elections in 1915, and in 1920 all women did.

- **The first woman elected to the Icelandic Parliament was Ingibjörn H. Bjarnason (1922).**
  The first female representative, Briet Bjarnhóðsinsdóttir, was elected as an alternative member but never actually took a seat in the Althingi. The first woman to be elected and actually sit as a member of the Althingi was Ingibjörn H. Bjarnason, who headed a Women’s List in national elections held on 8 July 1922.

- **The first female mayor in an Icelandic municipality was elected in 1957.**
  In 1958 women were only 1% of all council members in Iceland. In 1957 the first woman became mayor in Kópavogur and in 1959 in Reykjavík.

- **In 1970 the first female cabinet minister was appointed.**
  The same year, inspired by women’s rights and feminist movements all over the world, the “Red Stockings”, movement was founded and was a key radical force in raising awareness on various gender equality issues.

- **Icelandic women went on strike nationwide on 24 October 1975.**
  On 24 October 1975, more than 25,000 women in Iceland took a day off to emphasize the importance of women’s contribution to the economy, both in paid and unpaid work. As a result the society as a whole came to a halt. Also that same year, a law on three months maternal leave was approved, a new law on abortion, reproductive and maternal health was passed and the Women’s History Archives was founded.
• Iceland elected the first female Head of State in the world – President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir – in 1980.
  The fourth President of the Republic of Iceland was Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. She was elected in 1980 and stepped down in 1996 after four terms in office. Vigdís was the first woman in the world to be democratically elected Head of State. She is an important role model for Icelanders of all ages and remains active in public life and in the international community.

• Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir became Iceland’s first female Prime Minister in 2009.

• 42% of the candidates for the last elections in Iceland (2013) were women. 633 women ran for office at the election to the Icelandic Parliament.

• Today, 39.7% of the Parliamentarians in Iceland are women.
  Iceland is ranked number 12 in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s World Classification. 25 out of 63 seats of the Parliament of Iceland are occupied by women. Iceland’s electoral system is based on proportional representation.

• Iceland has a high rate of women’s participation in the labour market (77.6%)
  Participation in the labour market by both men and women has always been at a high level in Iceland and the participation of women in the labour market in Iceland is one of the highest among the OECD countries. Women started entering the labour market at an increased rate in the 1970s. This development has been met with childcare for pre-school children, a legal right for parents to return to their jobs after childbirth and a generous parental leave system.

• 90% of children aged 1-5 years are in day-care in Iceland.
  The number of children attending kindergarten has increased immensely in the last 30 years. For children under the age of two: 9% in 1981 and 44% in 2009. In 2009, 95% of children aged 3 to 5 attended pre-schools (kindergartens).

• In the year 2000 the law regulating parental leave changed dramatically.
  Now Icelanders have a parental leave scheme that is unique. The total leave period is nine months long. Each parent has three months leave which is non-transferable and in addition the parents can divide three months as they like. During their leave parents who have been working full time receive 80% of their former salary up to a certain ceiling. Fathers have grasped this opportunity with enthusiasm and around 90% use their paternal leave.
• **A full ban on strip clubs was approved in Iceland in 2010.**
  In 2009 the purchasing of sexual services was made illegal with changes to the 206th article of the General Penal Code (No. 19/1940). It is illegal to advertise and to benefit from prostitution, e.g. through pimping and other means. In 2010 a full ban on strip clubs was enacted with a change in the Act on restaurants, accommodations and entertainment (No. 85/2007), banning the profiting from nudity.

• **Iceland approved a 3-year plan on implementing Gender Budgeting in 2011.**
  Implementation of Gender Budgeting started in 2009. The objective is to make the impact on the genders visible, so it is possible to respond and re-evaluate policies, expenditures, and sources of revenue in accordance with objectives for equality.

• **Iceland passed a new law that obligates companies to have a minimum of 40% of women or men in their boards in 2010.**
  The law took effect on 1 September 2013. In 2010 an amendment to the laws on public limited companies (No. 2/1995) and private limited companies (No. 138/1994) obligated companies that have over 50 employees to have both women and men on their company boards and if the board-members are more than three, the percentage of women or men cannot be under 40%. These amendments also included changes that will make monitoring easier. These changes took effect in 2013.

*Sources:
  http://eng.velferdarraduneyti.is/departments/gender-equality/
  http://jafnretti.is/D10/_Files/Gender_Equality_in_Iceland_2012.pdf
  http://www.althingi.is/vefur/women.html*
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