

Iceland - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Iceland is an island country situated in Northern Europe between the Greenland Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. The country covers 100, 250 square km of land and 2, 750 square km of water.² Iceland has the smallest population of any NATO member and is the only member with no standing army. Iceland is generally considered as one of the leading countries in the world in regard to human rights.

Official language: Icelandic

Ethnic groups: 89% Icelandic; 5% Polish; 1% Lithuanian; 5% other

Government: Constitutional parliamentary republic

- President: Guoni Th. Jóhannesson

- Prime Minister: Katrín Jakobsdóttir

- President of Parliament: Steingrímur J. Sigfússon

Death penalty: Unconstitutional

Population: 360, 390

Life expectancy: 82.9 years

Under-5 mortality: 2.1 per 1000 live births

Adult literacy: 99 percent



Section 1: Overall Development, Protection and Well-being

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ³



0.935 – Very High Human Development ⁴

According to the UNDP, Icelanders enjoyed a gross national income per capita of \$45,810, and could expect to have on average 12.4 years of schooling. Iceland has one of the highest HDIs in the world, ranking in the top 10.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life



Respected ⁵

There has been no reporting that government security forces arbitrarily killed protestors.

Freedom from Disappearance



Respected ⁶

There have been no reports of disappearances in Iceland.

Freedom from Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment



Respected ⁷

Such practices are prohibited by the constitution and the law. There has been no reporting that government officials employ such practices.

Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest or Detention



Respected ⁸

The law and constitution prohibit such practices in Iceland. There has been no reporting of arbitrary arrest or detention in Iceland.

Freedom from Denial of Fair Public Trial



Respected⁹

In Iceland, the constitution and law guarantees the right to an independent judiciary. The government normally respects judicial independence and impartiality.

Freedom from Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home or Correspondence



Respected¹⁰

In Iceland, the constitution and the law forbid such practices. There has been no reporting that government officials employ such practices.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of Speech and Press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹¹



Score: 14.71, Rank: 14 / 180 – Largely free, diverse and independent¹²

In 2010, the Icelandic Parliament unanimously adopted The Icelandic Modern Media Initiative parliamentary resolution. It aims to make the country an environment in favour of the “protection of sources, transparency, media freedom and independence”.

Freedom from Academic Censorship



Respected¹³

There has been no reporting of academic censorship for Iceland.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association



Respected¹⁴

The constitution and law allows for freedom of peaceful assembly and association. The government of Iceland generally respects these rights.

Freedom of Religion



Respected¹⁵

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief, which is generally upheld in practice, and protects the right to form religious associations.

Freedom of Movement



Respected¹⁶

Iceland’s constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government generally respects these rights.

Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons



Respected¹⁷

The law provides for the acceptance of asylum seekers and refugees and the government of Iceland provides for the support of local integration and resettlement.

Overall Protection of Civil Liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{18 19}



1 / 7 – Free²⁰

Iceland has a long history of protection of civil liberties. However, systematic exploitation of migrant workers by employers, especially in the tourism industry, has become a serious problem. The government’s response has been inadequate and wage theft is not yet punishable by law.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.

Overall Protection of Political Rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²¹



1 / 7 – Free²²

Iceland has a long history of protection of political rights. However, there are concerns of corruption in the country's political system due to close relationships between elected representatives and businesses, which serve each other's interests.

Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and Freedom from Corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²³



Score: 76%, Rank: 14 / 180 – Limited corruption²⁴

As of 2018, Iceland ranked 14th in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis Independent Investigations of Alleged Human Rights Violations



Respected²⁵

According to the US State Department, domestic and international human rights groups generally operate, investigate and publish their findings on human rights cases without government restriction in Iceland.

Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁶



No threat listed – Limited dangers to minorities²⁷

According to Minorities Rights Group International, Iceland does not have any minorities facing an immediate threat of sectarian violence.

Rights of Women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁸



Score: 85%, Rank: 1 / 149 – Very equal rights²⁹

Iceland is to date the most gender-equal country.

Rights of Children (*Kids Rights Index Overall Score*)³⁰



Score: 67.5%, Rank: 1 / 165 – Protected³¹

According to KidsRights Index 2019, Iceland is ranked in the first place with its overall score of 0.967 on life, health, education and protection indicators.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially Respected³²

In Iceland, the law mandates accessible buildings and proper communications for persons with disabilities. However, in cases of violations of those rights, the punishment – up to two years prison- barely ever takes place according to disability rights advocates.

Rights of National/Racial/Ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Partially Respected³³

The Icelandic parliament has adopted legislation prohibiting all forms of discriminations and guaranteeing equality. However, immigrants – mostly of Non-Western origin – and asylum seekers endured “occasional incidents of social harassment based on their ethnicity”.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Respected^{34 35}

There were no reports of abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation in Iceland. The country is generally designated as one of the most LGBT-friendly countries in the world.

Section 8: Workers’ Rights

Workers’ rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to Freedom of Association and to Collective bargaining



Respected³⁶

In Iceland, the law gives the right to workers to form and join independent associations, bargain collectively and manage legal strikes. The government generally respect these rights.

Freedom from Forced or Compulsory Labour



Respected³⁷

The Icelandic law forbids all forms of forced or compulsory labour.

Freedom of Children from Child Labour and a Minimum age of Employment



Respected³⁸

The Icelandic law forbids child labour and provides a minimum age of employment, which includes restrictions on working hours, promotes occupational safety and enforces health restrictions for children.

Right to Acceptable Working Conditions



Respected³⁹

Minimum wages in Iceland are negotiated in many collective bargaining agreements. They are applied to all employees, including foreign workers, in those occupations. Safety and health standards, guaranteed by law, have been adequately monitored.

Right to Employment



2.7 % - Reasonable unemployment⁴⁰

According to the international Labour Organization’s index, the unemployment rate for Iceland for 2018 is 2.7%, one of the lowest unemployment rates to date.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, Amnesty International and World Atlas. For death penalty see: “Death sentences and executions in 2018.” Amnesty International. April 10, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/04/death-penalty-facts-and-figures-2018/>

³ The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed September 20, 2019 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

⁴ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Iceland" UNDP, based on 2017 or the most recent year available. Accessed September 20, 2019. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland" U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁰ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹¹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom wherever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹² "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2019. Accessed September 25, 2019.

<https://rsf.org/en/iceland>

¹³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland." U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

¹⁴ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland" U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

¹⁵ "Iceland." International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. May 29, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iceland/>

¹⁶ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland" U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

¹⁷ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland" U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

¹⁸ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁹ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed September 25, 2019 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2019>

²⁰ "Iceland." Freedom in the World 2014: Iceland. January 1, 2019. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/iceland#.VIIIHLzGG9e8>.

²¹ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed September 25, 2019 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2019>

²² "Iceland." Freedom in the World 2019: Iceland. January 1, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/iceland>

²³ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²⁴ "Iceland." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.transparency.org/country/ISL>

²⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland." U.S Department of State. March 13, 2019. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

²⁶ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁷ "Iceland." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. 2019. Accessed September 25, 2019. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁸ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁹ "Iceland." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/data-explorer/#economy=ISL>

³⁰ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

³¹ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed September 28, 2019. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland." U.S State Department. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iceland/>

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed September 28, 2019. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁵ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁶ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 Iceland." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

⁴⁰ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2018. Accessed October 1, 2019.

https://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page21.jspx;ILOSTATCOOKIE=5OqSH9krGy7x -XSI1vFK-2QDY GJTBek3j1-qFcxlmqrbH03zfl-1991620366?_afLoop=870936213596089&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null#!%40%40%3F_afWindowId%3Dnull%26_afLoop%3D870936213596089%26_afWindowMode%3D0%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dkezi8hj8v_4