



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [Human Rights Reports](#) » [2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » [Iceland](#)

2009 Human Rights Report: Iceland

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

March 11, 2010

Iceland, with a population of 318,000, is a constitutional parliamentary republic. The president is the head of state; a prime minister, usually the head of the majority party, is head of government. There is a unicameral parliament (Althingi). In 2008 Olafur Ragnar Grimsson was reelected president in free and fair elections. After parliamentary elections on April 25, the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) and the Left-Green Movement (LG) formed a governing coalition led by Prime Minister Johanna Sigurdardottir (SDA). The elections were free and fair. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

Reported human rights problems included societal discrimination against minorities and foreigners, especially refugees and asylum seekers; violence against women; and reports of persons trafficked to and through the country.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions generally met international standards. The government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers, and such visits occurred during the year.

During the year media expressed concern regarding overcrowding at the main prison at Litla-Hraun and at Reykjavik's main pretrial detention facility. When overcrowding in the main facility occurred, pretrial detainees were held in local police

station jails. There was a waiting list of 240 persons convicted of crimes but unable to serve their sentences during the year due to a lack of prison space.

The government maintained a separate minimum-security prison for female inmates; however, because so few women were incarcerated (six on average), some men were also held there. Men housed in facilities with women were closely monitored and only interacted with women in the common areas; they did not share cellblocks. Juvenile offenders were normally held in facilities run and supervised by the Government Agency for Child Protection. In at least one instance, a child was held in detention with adults, since there was no separate facility for juveniles in the prison system. Pretrial detainees were held together with convicted prisoners, except in those instances when it was deemed necessary to place them in solitary confinement.

The government permitted visits by independent human rights observers during the year. Prisoners could, and did, request visits from Prisoners' Friends, a group of volunteers from the Icelandic Red Cross. The volunteers talked with the prisoners and provided them with second-hand clothes upon request. There were no prison visits by international human rights monitoring groups during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse and corruption. There were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention

Police may make arrests under a number of circumstances: when they believe a prosecutable offense has been committed; where necessary to prevent further offenses or destruction of evidence; to protect a suspect; or when a person refuses to obey police orders to move. Arrest warrants are usually not employed; the criminal code explicitly requires warrants only for arresting individuals who fail to appear at court for a hearing or a trial or at a prison to serve a sentence.

Persons placed under arrest are entitled to legal counsel, which the government provides for the indigent. Authorities must inform persons under arrest of their rights and must bring them before a judge within 24 hours. The judge determines whether a suspect must remain in custody during the investigation; the judge may grant conditional release, subject to assurances that the accused will appear for trial.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence in practice.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Courts do not use juries, but multijudge panels are common. Defendants are presumed innocent, and courts generally tried cases without delay. Defendants have access to legal counsel of their own choosing. For defendants unable to pay attorneys' fees, the government covers the cost; however, defendants who are found guilty are required to reimburse the government. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial, to confront witnesses, to introduce evidence, and to

The C
Affair
the U
Exter
cons:
polici

participate in the proceedings. They and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. At the discretion of the courts, prosecutors may introduce evidence that police obtained illegally. Defendants have the right to appeal, and the Supreme Court handles appeals expeditiously. These rights extend to all citizens without prejudice.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

A single court system handles both criminal and civil matters. The two levels of the judiciary--the district courts and the Supreme Court--were considered independent and impartial in civil matters. Lawsuits may seek damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation. Administrative remedies are available as well as judicial remedies for alleged wrongs.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Immigration law allows authorities to conduct house searches without a prior court order when there is a significant risk that delay would jeopardize an investigation of immigration fraud. In September 2008 police searched the temporary residence of asylum seekers in Reykjanesbaer, a municipality near Keflavik Airport, after obtaining a court order. The police conducted the search on the suspicion that some asylum seekers were withholding information pertinent to their asylum requests. Immigration authorities were still processing their findings at the end of the year.

Immigration law allows authorities to request DNA tests without court supervision in cases where they suspect immigration fraud. There were no reports that DNA testing took place during the year.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government respected these rights in practice. Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal.

The law establishes fines and imprisonment for up to three months for persons convicted of publicly deriding or belittling the religious doctrines of a lawful religious association active in the country. The law also establishes fines and imprisonment for up to two years for anyone who publicly ridicules, slanders, insults, threatens, or in any other manner publicly assaults a person or a group on the basis of their nationality, skin color, race, religion, or sexual orientation. There were no reports that the law was invoked during the year.

An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press. The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. According to data from Statistics Iceland, approximately 93 percent of the country's inhabitants used the Internet during the year.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice. The state financially supported and promoted the official religion, Lutheranism. Other religions did not receive equal financial support from the government or treatment in school curricula (grades 1-10).

The law specifies conditions and procedures that religious organizations other than the state church must follow to be registered by the government and to be eligible for a per-capita share of church tax funds from the government. The government did not place any restrictions or requirements on unregistered religious organizations, which, except for access to state funds, had the same rights as other groups in society. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights approved the registration of the Islamic Cultural Center of Iceland in March but rejected the registration application of the New Avalon Center in May. In October the ministry approved the registration of the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International and the Church of the Resurrected Life, which previously applied for registration as the New Avalon Center.

All citizens 16 years of age and older pay an annual church tax of 10,260 kronur (approximately \$82). According to an amendment to the law on church taxes passed in June, persons who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered and officially recognized, no longer have to pay church taxes. Previously the tax payment went to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists and ethical humanists had objected to having their fees go to the university, asserting that this was inconsistent with the right of freedom of association.

The state provided the Evangelical Lutheran State Church (ELSC) with a per capita share of the church tax funds. In addition, the ELSC received additional state funding that was not available to other registered religious organizations.

In July 2008 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) agreed to review the case of the Icelandic Pagan Association (Asatruarfelagid) to receive funding proportional to its membership from monies made available only to the state church. The Supreme Court had previously rejected the association's request. As of year's end, the ECHR had not issued a judgment in the case.

The Muslim Association of Iceland's long-pending application to the Reykjavik city planning commission for land to build a mosque encountered further delay during the year. Some observers believed that the commission was prejudiced against the proposed mosque, since the applications of other groups for similar plots made swifter progress during the same period.

School grades 1-10 (ages 6-15) in the public schools are required by law to include instruction in theology. The precise content of this instruction, however, can vary as the curriculum is not rigid and teachers are often given wide latitude in the classroom. Lessons on non-Christian religions are part of the curriculum, but some teachers reportedly focused primarily on Christianity. Students may be exempted from attending the classes upon parental request.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The Jewish community numbered fewer than 100 individuals. There was one report of an anti-Semitic act. The proprietor

of a Reykjavik bicycle store hung up a sign in his store in January that read that no Jews were welcome. The owner removed the sign in short order after receiving harsh public criticism.

The law establishes penalties of fines and up to two years in prison for verbal or physical assault on an individual or group based on religion. The law also establishes fines and imprisonment for up to three months for publicly deriding or belittling the religious doctrines of a lawful religious association active in the country.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2009 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

Protection of Refugees

The country is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Its laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Human rights advocates, however, complained about the ambiguous nature of the asylum system and the high refusal rate of asylum cases.

In practice, the government provided some protection against the expulsion or return of refugees to countries where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The government had no fixed refugee acceptance requirements.

Asylum seekers were eligible for government-subsidized health care during the processing of their cases, which at times took a year or longer. They could enroll their children in public schools after being in the country for three months, and some children of asylum seekers were enrolled in public schools during the year. Asylum seekers could also obtain work permits and attend Icelandic language classes.

During the year, the Directorate of Immigration processed 41 applications for asylum. It gave residential permits on humanitarian grounds to 10 persons and granted refugee status to three asylum seekers and two of their dependents. The Directorate of Immigration rejected eight asylum applications and deported 18 asylum seekers to other European countries on the basis of the Dublin Convention.

The minister of justice appoints the director of immigration, who also heads the adjudicating body for asylum cases. Some observers asserted that this arrangement could constitute a conflict of interest.

Human rights advocates criticized the law for not specifying which "significant human rights reasons" must underpin granting temporary residence (and eligibility for work permits) while asylum cases are processed, arguing that the situation created the possible appearance of arbitrary decisions. Observers noted that the law was ambiguous about the criteria for granting and denying asylum. This ambiguity, combined with the small number of approved asylum applications, left unclear what considerations were applied in adjudicating the applications of asylum seekers.

The law allows for accelerated refusal of applications deemed to be "manifestly unfounded." Asylum seekers can appeal denials to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. If rejected at that level, they can appeal to the courts. Human rights advocates have criticized this process, however, because several asylum applicants were deported when their deportation dates came up even though they were still awaiting a court decision on their appeal case.

In March the Supreme Court overturned a decision by the Directorate of Immigration to reject a 2004 asylum application by a Mauritanian citizen. The court stated that the directorate did not obtain necessary and accessible information on which to base its decision on the asylum request.

In July 2008 police carried out a deportation order from the Directorate of Immigration and deported a Kenyan asylum seeker to Italy without ruling on the merits of his claim. In August 2008 the minister of justice overturned the directorate's decision and ordered it to evaluate the basis of the Kenyan's asylum claim. The directorate was processing the case at year's end.

In July 2008 a report by the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) expressed concern over reports of inappropriate handling of asylum requests by law enforcement officers and border guards, for example, at airports and detention centers. The CAT report provided no specifics concerning the reported incidents.

The law permits the government to provide temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. The government has never made use of this authorization.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

On April 25, the country held parliamentary elections that were considered free and fair. In 2008 the incumbent president was reelected unopposed. Political parties could operate without restriction or outside interference.

There were 27 women in the 63-seat parliament and six women in the 12-member cabinet. Two of nine Supreme Court members and 14 of 40 district court judges were women. No members of minority groups held seats in either the parliament or the cabinet.

Section 4 Official Corruption and Government Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were no reports of government corruption during the year. In August the parliament created three independent junior special prosecutors to work alongside the special prosecutor to investigate allegations of public and private corruption related to the collapse of the country's three largest banks in October 2008.

The law provides for public access to government information, and the government provided access in practice for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. On occasion the government denied legal requests for information based on reasons of confidentiality. The government provided the legal reasons for denials. Appeals against refusals by government authorities to grant access to materials may be referred to an information committee consisting of three persons appointed by the prime minister. Permanent employees of government ministries may not be members of the committee.

Most public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws. In March, however, the parliament's presidium approved nonbinding rules stating that members of parliament are expected to report to the presidium their financial interests for public disclosure. Every member of parliament had registered his or her financial interests by year's end.

Section 5 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative and responsive to their views.

The Icelandic Human Rights Center was the leading human rights organization, vetting government legislation, reporting to international treaty monitoring bodies, and promoting human rights education and research. The center was funded by the government, the EU, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), unions, and the city of Reykjavik; it operated as an NGO.

An independent ombudsman, elected by parliament, monitored and reported to national and local authorities on human rights developments to ensure that all residents, whether or not they were citizens, received equal protection. Individuals could lodge complaints with the ombudsman about the decisions, procedures, and conduct of public officials and government agencies. The ombudsman may demand official reports, documents, and records, may summon officials to give testimony, and has access to official premises. Government agencies generally responded to the ombudsman's requests for information and documents within a reasonable time. While the ombudsman's recommendations are not binding on authorities, they were generally adopted.

Section 6 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and social status. Various laws implement these prohibitions, and the government effectively enforced them.

Women

Rape carries a maximum penalty of 16 years in prison. Judges typically imposed sentences of one to three years. Spousal rape is not explicitly addressed in the law. In previous years, the Icelandic Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence (Stigamot) noted that the number of reported rapes consistently rose faster than the number of convictions. According to national police statistics, there were 68 reported rapes in 2008. During that year prosecutors brought 10 cases to trial and obtained a conviction in one. In 2007 convictions were obtained in 17 of the 19 cases that went to trial. Activists continued to complain that the burden of proof in rape cases was too heavy and discouraged victims from reporting acts of rape and the authorities from prosecuting them. The government did not respond formally to these concerns.

The law prohibits domestic violence; however, violence against women continued to be a problem. Police statistics indicated that the incidence of reported violence against women, including rape and sexual assault, was low; however, the number of women seeking medical and counseling assistance suggested that many incidents went unreported. During the year, 117 women sought temporary lodging at the country's shelter for women, mainly because of domestic violence. The shelter offered counseling to 197 clients. During the year 128 women sought assistance at the rape crisis center of the national hospital (Landspítali University Hospital).

In February the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security released the results of a survey conducted to gauge the

extent of violence against women. The survey indicated that 42 percent of the country's women suffered physical or sexual violence or been threatened with it since they were 16 years old.

The law permits judges to increase the sentences of persons who commit violence against persons with whom they had a domestic relationship or other close bond. However, there were no domestic violence cases in which judges actually handed down stronger sentences, and one respected activist expressed concern that sentences were too mild. The State Prosecutor's Office reported 263 cases of domestic quarrelling and 252 cases of domestic violence during the year.

Although courts could issue restraining orders, advocates expressed concern that such orders were ineffective because courts granted them only in extreme circumstances and the court system took too long to issue them. Victims of sex crimes were entitled to lawyers to advise them of their rights and help them pursue cases against the alleged assailants; however, a large majority of victims declined to press charges or chose to forgo trial, in part to avoid publicity.

Some local human rights monitors attributed underreporting of domestic violence and sex crimes to the infrequency of convictions and to traditionally light sentences. In the few cases of domestic violence that went to court, the courts continued in many cases to base sentences on precedent and rarely made full use of the more stringent sentencing authority available under the law. According to statistics from the Icelandic Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence, 14 percent of its clients pressed charges in 2008, the latest year for which data was available.

The government helped finance the Icelandic Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence, the rape crisis center of the national hospital, and other organizations that assisted victims of domestic or gender-based violence. In addition to partially funding such services, the government provided help to immigrant women in abusive relationships, offering emergency accommodation, counseling, and information on legal rights.

Prostitution is legal; however, in April the parliament passed legislation criminalizing the buying of sexual services. The law also prohibits advertising for prostitution and prohibits a third party, or pimp, from profiting from prostitution or procurement of sexual services. It is also illegal for a person to rent facilities for prostitution.

Two laws prohibit sexual harassment. The general penal code prohibits sexual harassment and stipulates that violations are punishable by imprisonment. The law on equal status defines sexual harassment more broadly. The law requires employers and organization supervisors to make specific arrangements to prevent employees, students, and clients from becoming victims of gender-based or sexual harassment. Victims of harassment could report incidents to the Complaints Committee on Equal Status. Employers were only required to provide their employees with information on the legal prohibitions against sexual harassment in workplaces with 25 or more employees. Gender equality advocates reported receiving several complaints during the year; there were two court cases, but no guilty verdicts.

Couples and individuals have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. There was easy access to contraception and skilled attendance during childbirth, and women were diagnosed and treated for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, equally with men.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including under the family and property laws and in the judicial system. However, despite laws that require equal pay for equal work, a pay gap existed between men and women. According to a 2008 study commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, women earned 16 percent less than men.

The law states that employers and unions should work towards gender equality in the labor market, especially in managerial positions, and that employers should work towards declassifying jobs as primarily female- or male-oriented.

The government funded a center for promoting gender equality to administer the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men. The center also provided counseling and education on gender equality to national and municipal authorities, institutions, companies, individuals, and NGOs. The minister of social affairs and social security appoints members of the Complaints Committee on Equal Status, which adjudicates alleged violations of the act. The minister also appoints members of Equal Status Council, drawn from national women's organizations, the University of Iceland, and labor and professional groups. The council makes recommendations for equalizing the status of men and women in the workplace.

During the year the Complaints Committee on Equal Status decided eight cases. In one case the committee found that Kaupthing Bank breached the law on equal status when, after terminating a female employee and three male employees, it offered jobs to the three men but not to the woman. The committee also found that the bank had discriminated against the same woman when she received lower bonus payments than a male employee in a similar position.

Children

Citizenship is derived by birth from one's parents (*jus sanguinis*). A child acquires the country's citizenship at birth if both parents are Icelandic citizens, if the mother is an Icelandic citizen, or if the father is an Icelandic citizen and is married to a foreign mother. This does not apply if a mixed-nationality couple had obtained a judicial separation at the time when the child was conceived.

In 2008 local child protection committees, whose work is coordinated by the Agency for Child Protection, received 1,526 reports of abuse, including 571 reports of emotional abuse, 480 of physical abuse, and 479 of sexual abuse. The agency operated four treatment centers and a diagnostic facility for abused and troubled minors and coordinated the work of 30 committees throughout the country that were responsible for managing child protection issues in their local areas. The local committees hired professionals with expertise in social work and child protection.

The government maintained a children's assessment center to accelerate prosecution of child sexual abuse cases and to lessen the trauma experienced by the child. During the year the center conducted 217 investigative interviews, provided assessments and therapy for 110 children, and performed 27 medical examinations. The center was intended to create a safe and secure environment where child victims might feel more comfortable talking about their abuse. It brought together police, prosecutors, judges, doctors, and officials from child protection services. After an interview with a child, the assessment center could analyze the possible effects of the sexual abuse on the child and family. The children's assessment center could also provide advice to parents. District court judges were not required to use the center, and the Reykjavik District Court held investigatory interviews in its courthouse instead, a practice that concerned some children's rights advocates.

The children's ombudsman, who is appointed by the prime minister but acts independently of the government, has a mandate to protect children's rights, interests, and welfare. When investigating complaints, which typically involved physical and psychological abuse and inadequate accommodation for children with illnesses or disabilities, the ombudsman had access to all public and private institutions that house or otherwise care for children. The ombudsman was not empowered to intervene in individual cases but could investigate them for indications of a general trend. The ombudsman could also initiate cases at her discretion. While the ombudsman's recommendations are not binding on authorities, they are generally adopted.

The law criminalizes statutory rape, and it is punishable by up to 12 years in prison. The minimum age for consensual sex is 14. The law prohibits child pornography and it is punishable by up to two years in prison.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons with the aim of sexual abuse or forced labor and provides for imprisonment of up to eight years for such offenses. Victims may file civil suits or seek legal action against the traffickers. During the year there were reports that persons were trafficked to and through the country.

In a September report on human trafficking, the Icelandic Red Cross stated that 59 to 128 persons were trafficked to the country between 2005 and 2008.

An estimated 70 percent of trafficking cases involved underpaid or mistreated workers in nightclubs and massage parlors and as women in prostitution trafficked from Eastern Europe, Africa, Brazil, and Southeast Asia. Nightclub and massage parlor workers who were allegedly forced to work in prostitution may have stayed for several months before being trafficked onward, while others may have spent only a few days in Reykjavik before being moved abroad. Observers also alleged that workers in the construction and restaurant industries were exploited. Throughout the year, the Directorate of Labor investigated cases involving undocumented workers suspected of being victims of trafficking. In some cases employers were fined for noncompliance with labor laws, but none were charged with trafficking.

According to a February report by the national police commissioner on organized crime and terrorist threats, traffickers are often connected with dealers of illegal narcotics, and international organized crime rings traffic foreign women to the country for the purpose of prostitution.

In December the Reykjanes District Court acquitted a woman of Equatorial Guinean origin of trafficking charges; she was the first person in the country ever to be indicted on such charges. The woman was convicted of profiting from prostitution as a third party, and two days later she was charged again on separate counts of trafficking. The matter had not gone to court by year's end.

In March the parliament approved the country's first national action plan on trafficking in persons. In October the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights took over primary responsibility from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security for efforts to prevent and punish trafficking. In December the parliament amended the legislative definition of a trafficking victim to pave the way for the ratification of the Palermo Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Legal measures to reduce the number and operations of strip clubs in the Reykjavik metropolitan area, the predominant location of prostitution and trafficking cases, have been somewhat successful. At the end of the year, as a result of strengthened licensing requirements for such establishments, only three strip clubs remained in operation in the country, all in the Reykjavik area. The owners of these establishments were reportedly able to exploit loopholes in the law to remain in operation. According to NGO representatives and police, rumors continued to circulate that prostitution, illegal nude shows, and lap dances took place in the three establishments.

The government provided funding for various organizations that assist victims of trafficking but did not have its own assistance program for trafficking victims.

The Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* can be found at www.state.gov/q/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, and there were no reports of official discrimination in employment, education, access to health care, and the provision of other state services. The law also provides that persons with disabilities receive preference for government jobs when they are at least as qualified as other applicants.

However, disability rights advocates asserted that the law was not fully implemented and that persons with disabilities constituted a majority of the country's poor.

Building regulations require that public accommodations and government buildings, including elevators, be accessible to persons in wheelchairs, that public property managers reserve 1 percent of parking spaces (a minimum of one space) for persons with disabilities, and that sidewalks outside the main entrance of such buildings be kept clear of ice and snow to the extent possible. Violations of these regulations are punishable by a fine or a jail sentence of up to two years; however, the main association for persons with disabilities complained that authorities rarely, if ever, assessed penalties for noncompliance.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security was the lead government body responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. It coordinated the work of six regional offices that provided services and support to persons with disabilities. It also maintained a diagnostic and advisory center in Reykjavik that aimed to create conditions allowing persons with disabilities to lead normal lives.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, stood out from the largely homogeneous population and suffered occasional incidents of harassment based on their ethnicity.

Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons' organizations in the country included Samtokin '78, the major interest and activist group, and Trans-Iceland, an activist organization for transgender persons.

Reykjavik Gay Pride is an independent organization responsible for coordinating annual gay pride festivities in Reykjavik. An estimated 80,000-100,000 persons attended the annual gay pride march in Reykjavik in August. The government authorized the march and police provided sufficient protection to marchers.

There were no reports of societal violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal violence or discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS.

Section 7 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join independent unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers exercised these rights. Labor unions were independent of the government and political parties. Approximately 80-85 percent of all eligible workers belonged to unions. Workers had the right to strike and exercised this right in practice. The government has imposed mandatory mediation when strikes have threatened key sectors in the economy, such as in the fishing industry.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference and prohibits antiunion discrimination and employer interference in union functions, and the government protected these rights in practice. The law allows workers, including foreign workers, to bargain collectively, and workers exercised this right in practice. Nearly 100 percent of the workforce was covered by collective bargaining agreements.

There were no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that women were trafficked to the country from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Brazil for sexual exploitation. There were also reports of persons being trafficked to the country to work in the construction, manufacturing, and restaurant industries.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The government effectively implemented laws and policies to protect children from exploitation in the workplace.

The law prohibits the employment of persons younger than 16 in factories, on ships, or in other places that are hazardous or require hard labor; this prohibition was observed in practice. Children who are 14 or 15 may work part time or during school vacations in light, nonhazardous jobs. Their work hours must not exceed the ordinary work hours of adults in the same positions. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health (AOSH) enforced child labor regulations effectively.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not establish a minimum wage. The minimum wages negotiated in various collective bargaining agreements applied automatically to all employees in those occupations, including foreign workers, regardless of union membership. While the agreements can be either industry- or sector-wide, or in some cases firm-specific, the negotiated wage levels are occupation-specific. Labor contracts provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The standard legal workweek is 40 hours, including nearly three hours of paid breaks a week. Work exceeding eight hours per day must be compensated as overtime. Workers are entitled to 11 hours of rest within each 24-hour period and to a day off every week. Under special defined circumstances, employers may reduce the 11-hour rest period to no less than eight hours, but they must then compensate workers with one-and-a-half hours of rest for every hour of reduction. They may also postpone a worker's day off, but the worker must receive the corresponding rest time within 14 days. Foreign workers are entitled to the same protections in terms of working time and rest periods as citizens. The AOSH effectively enforced these regulations.

There were indications that undocumented foreign workers--primarily men in the construction and restaurant industries--were underpaid and required to work long hours while living in substandard housing or even sleeping at building sites. Most sources stressed that the men willingly worked illegally to earn more than they might have expected in their East European or Baltic home countries. The size of the immigrant labor force shrank drastically because of the country's financial and economic crisis that began in fall 2008.

The law sets health and safety standards, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security administers and enforces them through the AOSH, which conducted both proactive and reactive inspections. The ministry can close workplaces that fail to meet safety and health standards. Workers have a collective, but not individual, right to refuse to work at a job that does not meet occupational safety and health criteria. It is illegal to fire workers for reporting unsafe or unhealthy conditions, and this law is generally observed in practice.