

ICELAND 2013 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Iceland is a constitutional parliamentary republic. The president is the head of state; a prime minister, usually the leader of the largest party, is head of government. There is a unicameral parliament (Althingi). In June 2012 voters reelected Olafur Ragnar Grimsson president in a free and fair election. After free and fair parliamentary elections on April 27, the Independence Party and the Progressive Party (PP) formed a governing coalition led by Prime Minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson (PP). Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Security forces did not commit human rights abuses.

The most important human rights problems reported during the year included violence against women and children. Authorities sometimes incarcerated juveniles in the same cell with adults and pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners. The integration of foreigners into the country's society and especially its workforce proceeded slowly; there was some social discrimination and an increased danger of work accidents if the worker did not speak Icelandic.

Other human rights problems included the slow, possibly arbitrary process of granting asylum, which was vulnerable to conflicts of interest; and some discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment and access to public places.

There were no reports of officials committing abuses in the security services or elsewhere in the government.

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. The State Prosecutor examines cases and opens investigations when security forces are suspected of unlawful killings. The state prosecutor opened an investigation of the first killing of a person by police in the country's history on December 2.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances, abductions, or kidnappings.

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, and the government permitted visits by independent human rights observers.

Physical Conditions: For the period January 1-September 30, the daily average number of prisoners was 156 persons, and the daily average number of pretrial detainees was 18. Prison facilities could hold 165 prisoners. The government maintained a separate minimum-security prison for female inmates; however, because so few women were incarcerated (seven on average for the period January 1-September 30), some men also were held there. Authorities closely monitored men held in facilities with women and men only interacted with women in the common areas and did not share cellblocks. A delegation from the Council of Europe's (COE's) Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visiting the country in 2012 urged the government, in its final report published in November, to ensure that both female and male prisoners at this minimum-security prison agree on interacting with each other in the common areas. Authorities normally held juvenile offenders in nonprison facilities run and supervised by the Government Agency for Child Protection. As of September 30, in one or two instances, however, authorities held children in detention with adults, since there was no separate facility for juveniles in the prison system. The CPT recommended that juvenile offenders no longer be held in detention with adults and that they only be detained in facilities operated under the Government Agency for Child Protection. Authorities held pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners except in those instances when authorities deemed it necessary to place a convicted prisoner in solitary confinement. In June the government indicted two prisoners for assaulting a fellow prisoner who died in prison in May 2012 as a result of his injuries. Prisoners had access to potable water.

When overcrowding in the main prison at Litla-Hraun or in Reykjavik's main pretrial detention facility occurred, authorities held pretrial detainees in jails in local police stations. As of September 30, there was a waiting list of approximately 440 persons convicted of crimes, but unable to serve their sentences during the year due to a lack of prison space.

Administration: The Prison and Probation Administration (PPA) maintained records to ensure that prisoners did not serve beyond the maximum sentence for the charged offense. The PPA also decided whether convicted prisoners who received a prison sentence of less than six months could serve their sentences in community service rather than in prison. Possible alternatives to prison sentences for nonviolent offenders included electronic monitoring for individuals with suspended sentences and expanded use of community service.

The parliament's ombudsman can on his own initiative take up a prison problem and did so on several occasions. In an October draft report on a May visit to the Litla-Hraun prison the ombudsman expressed his concerns that it might be unconstitutional and in contravention to the European Convention on Human Rights to keep mentally ill prisoners in the prison instead of in a mental health facility, at least if appropriate mental health services are not guaranteed. The ombudsman urged the Minister of Welfare, the Minister of the Interior, and the PPA to ensure that mentally ill prisoners receive necessary mental health services while in prison. Authorities permitted prisoners and detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities and the parliament's ombudsman without censorship and to request investigation of credible allegations of inhumane conditions if they so chose. There were no allegations of inhumane conditions during the year. Authorities allowed prisoners and detainees reasonable access to visitors and permitted religious observance.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring of prison conditions by independent local and international human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, but no such visits occurred as of September 30. In September 2012 a delegation from the CPT visited several prisons, detention centers, and psychiatric facilities in the country, and published its final report in November.

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

The national police maintain internal security. In addition, the Icelandic Coast Guard (ICG) carries out general law enforcement duties at sea. The police forces and the ICG both fall under the purview of the Ministry of the Interior.

Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the police and the ICG, and the government has effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse

and corruption. While there were no reports of impunity involving the security forces during the year, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in a 2012 report that there was no mechanism independent of the police and prosecution authorities for the investigation of allegations of police misconduct.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police may make arrests under a number of circumstances, such as when they believe a prosecutable offense has been committed, when they see a need to prevent further offenses or destruction of evidence, when they need to protect a suspect, or when a person refuses to obey police orders to move. The law 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.

Authorities must promptly upon arrest inform persons placed under arrest of the charges against them, and, upon arrival at the police station, the law entitles detainees to legal counsel, which the government provides for the indigent. Authorities must inform a person under arrest of his rights and bring him before a judge within 24 hours of arrest. 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. There was no functioning bail system.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right. Defendants are presumed innocent. Authorities must inform them of the charges against them promptly and in detail. Noncitizens have the right to interpretation. Trials are fair, take place without delay, and are generally public but judges may close them at the defendant's request or when minors are involved. Courts do not use juries, but multi-judge panels are common. Defendants have access to legal counsel of their own choosing. The government covers attorneys' fees of defendants unable to pay, but the law requires defendants found guilty to reimburse the government. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, to be present at their trial, to confront witnesses, to present witnesses and evidence on their behalf, and to 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 not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants have the right to appeal, and the Supreme Court handles appeals expeditiously. These rights extend to all defendants without prejudice.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals may seek damages for, or cessation of, a human rights violation, and they can appeal decisions to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). A single court system handles both criminal and civil matters. The public considered the judiciary independent and impartial in civil matters. Administrative remedies are also available for alleged wrongs.

Regional Human Rights Court Decisions

The country is subject to the jurisdiction of the ECHR.

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

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

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. Immigration law also allows authorities to request DNA tests without court supervision in cases of suspected 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 and the law provide for freedom of speech and press, and the government generally respected these rights. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of speech and press.

Freedom of Speech: The law establishes fines and imprisonment for up to three months for persons convicted of publicly deriding or belittling the religious doctrines of an active religious organization registered 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 because of nationality, skin color, race, religion, or sexual orientation. There were no reports that the government invoked these laws during the year.

Press Freedoms: The independent media generally were active and expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

In June, Svavar Halldorsson, a former journalist at the National Broadcasting Service, appealed to the ECHR a 2012 Supreme Court ruling in a libel case that business tycoon Jon Asgeir Johannesson won against him. The libel charges stemmed from Johannesson's alleged role in the country's financial collapse in 2008.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the internet or credible reports that the government monitored e-mail or internet chat rooms without appropriate legal authority. According to Statistics Iceland, 97 percent of households had internet access, and 97 percent of citizens used the internet.

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 and law provide for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/rpt/.

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

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

Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The government had no fixed refugee acceptance requirements. In 2012 the country received nine Afghan refugees through the UNHCR. The processing of asylum requests at times took a year or longer. The government temporarily allocated additional funds to the Directorate of Immigration in order to reduce processing times due to a steep increase in asylum requests during the year.

The Minister of the Interior appoints the head of the Directorate of Immigration, which is also the adjudicating body of first instance for asylum cases. Some observers, including the 2012 ECRI report, asserted that this hierarchy could constitute a conflict of interest because asylum seekers must appeal denials to the Ministry of the Interior and have no possibility to appeal an adverse decision to an independent and impartial judicial mechanism empowered to consider the merits of the case.

Human rights advocates criticized the law for not specifying the “significant human rights reasons” used as the basis for granting applicants temporary residence and eligibility for work permits, arguing that the situation created the possible appearance of arbitrary decisions. This ambiguity, combined with the small number of approved asylum applications, left unclear what considerations the government applied in adjudicating the applications of asylum seekers. The law allows for accelerated refusal of applications deemed to be “manifestly unfounded.”

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: The country adheres to the EU’s Dublin III regulation, which allows for the return of refugees and asylum seekers to the country of entry into the Dublin regulation’s area.

Access to Basic Services: Human rights advocates criticized the law for not allowing the registration of asylum seekers into the public health care system until six months after the government grants their asylum request. In contrast,

refugees whom the government decided to accept based on a UNHCR assessment of overall resettlement needs (quota refugees) enjoyed access to the system immediately upon entering the country.

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

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

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: On April 27, the country held parliamentary elections that observers considered free and fair. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe deployed an election assessment mission to monitor the election process. In 2012 voters reelected the president in a free and fair election.

Participation of Women and Minorities: There were 25 women in the 63-seat parliament. Two of the six deputy speakers were women. There were three women in the nine-member cabinet. Two of the 12 Supreme Court judges and 21 of 44 district court judges were women. No members of minority groups held seats in either parliament or the cabinet.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were no reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: The Office of the National Commissioner of Police and the Office of the Special Prosecutor are responsible for investigating corruption cases. The National Audit Office audits state agencies and enterprises and verifies their financial statements; examines the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of public spending and whether state funds are administered as parliament intended; and evaluates the adequacy and performance of the internal controls of state agencies. These agencies did not actively collaborate with civil society, but operated effectively and independently.

Whistleblower Protection: The law provides for protection of public and private employees who make internal disclosures of evidence of illegality.

Financial Disclosure: Most public officials were not subject to financial disclosure laws. Members of parliament are required to report their financial interests to the parliamentary speaker's Committee for Public Disclosure, but not every member did so by the beginning of December. The law mandates no agency to monitor and verify disclosures. There were no criminal or administrative sanctions for noncompliance. The declaration regime does not include assets and income of spouses and dependent children.

Public Access to Information: The law provides for public access to government information, and the government provided access for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media. The government occasionally denied legal requests for information based on grounds of confidentiality. There were administrative sanctions for nondisclosure. The government provided the legal reasons for denials. There were no public outreach activities during the year. Staff members of government ministries received training in the State School of Government on how to encourage effective use of the law.

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.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The parliament's ombudsman, elected by parliament for a period of four years, secures the rights of the citizens to equal and impartial treatment in their dealings with public authorities. The ombudsman is independent from any orders, including from parliament, when exercising his functions. Individuals can 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, the government generally adopted them.

Parliament's Judicial Affairs and Education Committee is responsible for legislative oversight of human rights in the country.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and social status. Various laws implement these prohibitions, and the government effectively enforced them. Following his visit to the country in January 2012, COE Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg, asserted that the law does not protect all vulnerable persons equally and that persons with disabilities, older persons, members of ethnic and religious minorities, and transgender persons would benefit from stronger protections against discrimination.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape carries a maximum penalty of 16 years in prison. Judges typically imposed sentences of one to three years. The law does not explicitly address spousal rape. Activists continued to complain that the burden of proof in rape cases was too heavy and discouraged victims from reporting acts of rape and authorities from prosecuting them. The government did not respond formally to these concerns.

According to national police statistics, 123 rapes were reported in 2012, the most recent data available. According to the latest available information from the State Prosecutor's Office, in 2012 prosecutors brought 21 cases to trial and obtained a conviction in three (seven cases remained pending in the Supreme Court). In 2011 prosecutors obtained convictions in eight of the 21 cases that went to trial (two cases remained pending in the Supreme Court). In previous years the Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence noted that the number of reported rapes consistently rose faster than the number of convictions.

While the law prohibits domestic violence, violence against women continued to be a problem. The penalties can range from a fine to 16 years in prison, depending on the type of violence committed. In addition 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. 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 and too few.

Law enforcement agencies reported 264 cases of domestic quarrelling and 333 cases of domestic violence to the State Prosecutor's Office in 2012, the most recent data available. A large majority of victims historically declined to press charges or chose to forgo trial, in part to avoid publicity. Some local human rights monitors attributed the 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 often continued to base sentences on precedent and rarely made full use of the more stringent sentencing authority available under the law. In 2012, the most recent year for which data was available, 9.6 percent of the clients of the Counseling and Information Center for Survivors of Sexual Violence pressed charges.

Victims of domestic violence can request police to remove perpetrators physically from the home for up to four weeks at a time. Police can also impose a 72-hour restraining order to prevent the abusers from coming into proximity with the victim, and courts can extend this restraining order for up to a year. The law entitles victims of sex crimes to a lawyer to advise them of their rights and to help them pursue charges against the alleged assailants.

In 2012, 130 women sought assistance at the rape crisis center of the National University Hospital of Iceland, and 113 women sought temporary lodging at the country's shelter for women, mainly because of domestic violence. The shelter offered counseling to 211 clients.

The government helped finance the 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.

Sexual Harassment: Two laws prohibit sexual harassment. The general penal code prohibits sexual harassment and stipulates that violations are punishable by imprisonment for up to two years. The law on equal status defines sexual harassment more broadly as any type of unfair or offensive physical, verbal, or symbolic sexual behavior that is unwanted and affects the self-respect of the victim, and is continued despite a clear indication that the behavior is undesired. 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 can report incidents to the Complaints Committee on Equal Status. The law requires only employers with 25 or more employees to provide their employees information on the legal prohibitions against sexual harassment in the workplace.

Reproductive Rights: 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.

Discrimination: Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including under the family, labor, property, and inheritance laws. 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 Center for Gender Equality (CGE) reported that many more men than women were in managerial positions.

Despite laws that require equal pay for equal work, a pay gap existed between men and women. Using Eurostat methodology, Statistics Iceland published a report in April showing the gender pay gap amounted to 18.1 percent overall, with 18.5 percent in the private sector and 16.2 percent in the public sector. The survey did not take into consideration factors such as type of profession, education, age, and length of employment. In August a salary survey conducted by the Association of Academics showed the gender pay gap to be nearly 12 percent when taking into account working hours, education, age, number of persons supervised, and level of financial responsibility. In September a salary survey commissioned by the Federation of State and Municipal Employees showed the gender pay gap to be 11.4 percent among the federation's membership when taking into working hours, education, age, number of persons supervised, type of profession, and length of employment.

The state-run CGE promoted gender equality and provided counseling and education on gender equality to national and municipal authorities, institutions, companies, individuals, and nongovernmental organizations. The Minister of Social Affairs and Housing appoints members of the Complaints Committee on Equal Status, which adjudicates alleged violations of the law. The minister also appoints members of the 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.

As of November 14, the Complaints Committee on Equal Status ruled that the law on equal status had been violated two times. In the first case, the committee ruled that the National Broadcasting Service had violated the equal status law three times: first, by unlawfully firing a woman from the position of sound technician; second, by hiring a man instead of her as a substitute sound technician in April 2012; and third, by hiring two men as substitute sound technicians in June 2012 instead of the woman, who was deemed at least equally qualified. In the other case, the National University Hospital violated the law by hiring a woman as the head of the hospital's department of vascular surgery instead of a man who was deemed more qualified.

Children

Birth Registration: 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 the child's foreign mother. Registration of birth is prompt. If a mixed-nationality couple had obtained a judicial separation at the time when the child was conceived, however, the child acquires the mother's citizenship. A stateless child can become an Icelandic citizen at the age of three. In both cases the child's access to social services depends on whether he or she has a residence permit in the country.

Child Abuse: In 2012, the latest year for which data was available, local child protection committees, whose work the Agency for Child Protection coordinates, received 1,795 reports of abuse, including 933 reports of emotional abuse, 428 of physical abuse, and 467 of sexual abuse (some cases counted as more than one kind of abuse). The agency operated three treatment centers and a diagnostic facility for abused and troubled minors. It also coordinated the work of 27 committees throughout the country responsible for local management of child protection problems. 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 lessen the trauma experienced by the child. In 2012 the center conducted 53 investigative interviews and 156 exploratory interviews, provided assessments and therapy for 99 children, and performed nine medical examinations.

The prime minister appoints the children's ombudsman who acts independently of the government. The ombudsman's mandate is 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 has access to all public and private institutions that housed or otherwise cared for children. The ombudsman is not empowered to intervene in individual cases but can investigate them for indications of a general trend. The ombudsman can also initiate cases at her discretion. While the ombudsman's recommendations are not binding on authorities, generally the government adopted them.

In April the government allocated 79 million kronur (\$653 thousand) to counter sexual violence against children. The measures included hiring more police officers to investigate sex crimes, hiring additional prosecutors, and increasing the number of specialists working at the children's assessment center.

Forced and Early Marriage: The country's minimum age for marriage is 18 for both sexes. There is no reported problem of forced and early marriage. In 2011, the most recent data available, there were no marriages of persons under the age of 18.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes statutory rape with incarceration for at least one year and up to 16 years. The minimum age for consensual sex is 15. The law prohibits child pornography, which is punishable by up to two years in prison. The government effectively enforced these laws.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. For information see the Department of State's country-specific information at http://travel.state.gov/abduction/country/country_3781.html

Anti-Semitism

Officials estimated the Jewish community to be fewer than 100 individuals; there was no synagogue or Jewish cultural center. During the year there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care, and the provision of other state services. The law provides that persons with disabilities receive preference for government jobs when they are at least as qualified as other applicants. Disability rights advocates asserted that the law was not implemented fully and that persons with disabilities constituted a majority of the country's poor. Children with disabilities attended school (primary, secondary, and higher education).

The law provides that persons with disabilities had access to buildings, information, and communications. Building regulations prescribe that buildings and building premises be designed in accordance with "universal design." "Universal design" is meant to ensure that persons are not discriminated against on the basis of a disability or illness regarding access or the general use of

buildings, and to ensure that people can safely enter and exit buildings, even under abnormal circumstances, such as in the case of fire. Disability rights advocates complained that the law and regulations were not fully implemented, and also complained that access to public information was unsatisfactory, since not all persons with disabilities had access to the internet. One domestic airline did not accommodate persons in wheelchairs due to the small size of its airplanes. While violations of these regulations are punishable by a fine or a jail sentence of up to two years, one of the main associations for persons with disabilities complained that authorities rarely, if ever, assessed penalties for noncompliance.

In May the Ministry of Welfare published a report drafted by the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland and the University of Iceland Center for Disability on violence against women with disabilities. The researchers interviewed 13 women with disabilities who reported being victims of violence. The report concluded that social isolation and diminished gender identity are among the consequences of the violence.

The Ministry of Welfare was the lead government body responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The municipalities in each of the country's 10 regions are responsible for organizing and delivering services and support to persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Welfare 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, suffered occasional incidents of harassment based on their ethnicity.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that some landlords were reluctant or unwilling to rent residential facilities to persons other than ethnic Icelanders. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that some employers might without reason limit their hiring to native Icelandic-speaking individuals.

In 2012 a group of Icelandic teenagers of Asian descent captured on video a white Icelandic man harassing them with racial slurs in a shopping mall near Reykjavik. One of the teenagers posted the video to her Facebook page. Police investigated the case and the prosecution settled it with a fine.

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

The general penal code criminalizes discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. There were no reported incidents of violence or abuse, and stigma or intimidation was not a known or likely factor in preventing incidents of abuse from being reported.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

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

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. It is silent on whether workers fired for union activity should be reinstated, but it does permit the fining of employers who engage in this practice. The law permits the government to pass a provisional law to impose mandatory mediation when strikes threaten key sectors in the economy, such as the fishing industry.

The government protected these rights, and workers exercised them. Collective bargaining agreements covered nearly 100 percent of the workforce. Independent contractors sometimes hired subcontractors to avoid hiring workers with bargaining rights.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor and stipulates that violations are punishable by imprisonment for up to 12 years. The Directorate of Labor and the Directorate of Immigration effectively monitored the implementation of policies, regulations, and agreements relating to labor, trade and investment, and migration, respectively, for signs of forced labor.

There were claims employers subjected men and women to forced labor in massage parlors and restaurants through threats and the withholding of documents. There was no information on any victims of labor trafficking removed from forced labor during the year.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The constitution and law prohibit the employment of persons younger than 16 in factories, on ships, or in other places that are hazardous or require hard labor; employers observed this prohibition. Children who are 14 or 15 years of age 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 with effective inspections and penalties. The AOSH had adequate resources.

d. 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-wide, sector-wide, or in some cases firm-specific, the kind of position defined the negotiated wage levels.

The standard legal workweek is 40 hours, including nearly three hours of paid breaks a week. Paid annual holidays include 13 whole days and two half days. The law requires that employers must compensate work exceeding eight hours per day as overtime. Overtime pay does not vary significantly across unions, but unions determine the terms of overtime pay when negotiating a collective bargaining agreement with the employer's association. The law limits the total hours a worker may work, including overtime hours, to 48 hours a week on average during each four-month period. The law entitles workers to 11 hours of rest in each 24-hour period and one day off each 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. The AOSH enforced these regulations.

The law sets occupational health and safety standards, which are current and appropriate for the main industries, and the Ministry of Welfare administered and enforced them through the AOSH, which conducted both proactive and reactive inspections. The ministry can close workplaces that fail to meet safety and health standards, but it did not take that step during the year. The AOSH had sufficient resources and inspectors to enforce effectively standards in all sectors. The AOSH levied daily fines on companies that did not follow instructions urging them to improve work conditions. The AOSH continued education efforts from previous years aimed at decreasing the number of accidents involving young persons in fish processing jobs. The government

provided universal healthcare coverage to all workers, including those in the informal economy.

There were claims 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. Violations of occupational safety and health standards occurred in all sectors; however, in 2012 they occurred most frequently in the fish-processing industry. Young workers and employees who did not understand or speak Icelandic and did not know local rules and regulations were more likely to be subject to hazardous or exploitative working conditions. Foreign employees and unskilled laborers were more likely to be victims of workplace accidents. In 2012, the latest year for which data was available, the AOSH reported one workplace fatality and 1,358 accidents. Violations of wage and overtime standards were most common in the restaurant and hospitality sector.