

# **Government Policy on the Integration of Immigrants**

Ministry of Social Affairs  
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The goal of the Government of Iceland for a policy on immigrant issues is to ensure that all residents of Iceland enjoy equal opportunities and are active participants in society in as many fields as possible. This is the first time that such a policy has been approved in Iceland.

The term *immigrant* refers to a foreign national who has settled long term in Iceland but is born overseas, or both of whose parents are born overseas or have held foreign citizenship at some time. Immigrants share the characteristic that their native language is not Icelandic. The term native language refers to the first language learned by a child.

In 1994, foreign nationals were 1.7% of the total population of Iceland. This proportion had risen to 6% by year-end 2006. Icelandic employers' demand for workers explains this increase for the most part, making the employment participation of foreign nationals much greater in Iceland than in many other countries. At the beginning of 2007, it is estimated that about 10% of the workforce in Iceland are foreign nationals. A proportion of those who come to Iceland choose to settle here permanently. A decade ago, approximately 160 people were granted Icelandic citizenship annually. In 2005, this number had risen to 730.

Icelandic society benefits by providing people emigrating to Iceland with the opportunity to utilise their ability to work and exercise their ingenuity and talents. However, it is not enough to value immigrant contribution to society on the labour market alone. Immigrants generally bring their families with them to Iceland with the intention of settling here for longer or shorter periods.

Society as a whole needs to be able to react to new and altered circumstances on the labour market and in the school system, the health care services and other welfare services provided by the state and municipalities.

Knowledge of the Icelandic language is the key to Icelandic society and can be a deciding factor in the successful integration of immigrants into Icelandic society.

## Contents

<b>Policy goals</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>The core values of Icelandic society</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Foreign nationals in Iceland</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Icelandic language education for adults</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Dissemination and collection of information</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Employment issues and employment participation</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Education issues</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools .....	13
• <b>Educated teachers</b> .....	16
<b>Health care services</b> .....	<b>17</b>
• The health care system must be in a position to react to diseases among immigrants and employ specific actions due to immigrants in the event of diseases which are rare in Iceland and which must be treated. ....	19
<b>The role of municipalities</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Municipal social services .....	20
Child protection .....	21
Sports and leisure activities .....	21
<b>Issues relating to the disabled</b> .....	<b>22</b>

## **Policy goals**

The policy sets out the following goals and specifies the means to attain them:

### **Icelandic language education for adults**

- Adult immigrants, both on the labour market and outside it, shall have access to good education in the Icelandic language.
- Social studies shall form a part of the Icelandic language education for immigrants.
- Ensure the availability of educational material appropriate to the goals of the course curricula.
- Icelandic language courses shall be subject to quality assessment and monitoring.

### **Dissemination and collection of information**

- Immigrants shall have access to information on Icelandic society.
- Accessible information on immigration issues in Iceland.

### **Employment issues and employment participation**

- Foreign nationals living and working in Iceland shall have the appropriate residence and work permits.
- Foreign nationals on the Icelandic labour market shall enjoy the same terms and rights as others.
- Active employment participation on the Icelandic labour market.
- Legislation on the employment rights of foreigners shall be clearer.
- Dissemination of information on the Internet for employers as well as others.

### **Education issues**

#### **Preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools**

- Students in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic shall enjoy their right to education in Icelandic as a second language.
- Students in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic shall have the opportunity, as far as possible, to maintain their native language.
- The taking of examinations in Icelandic in elementary and secondary schools shall be made easier for students whose native language is not Icelandic.
- Participation in work related to children and adolescents shall be made easier for parents/guardians of foreign origin.
- School curricula shall be based on preparing students for active participation in a multicultural society.
- Assessment and recognition of foreign professional qualifications and education.

#### **Educated teachers**

- The number of well-educated teachers who have learned to teach Icelandic as a second language shall be increased.

## **Health care services**

- Immigrants shall have access to satisfactory health care services in Iceland in accordance with the Act on Health Care Services, the Social Security Act and the Act on Patients. Immigrants shall enjoy the same services as Icelanders.
- Language difficulties shall not prevent the exchange of information between the individual and the health care employee.
- Health care employees shall be knowledgeable about different cultures insofar as this can be important with respect to immigrants who need health care services.
- Information on social security and the organisation and structure of health care services shall be accessible to immigrants.
- Attention shall be paid to specialised health care issues among immigrants, with the aim of improving their health and well-being.
- The health care system must be in a position to react to diseases among immigrants and employ specific actions due to immigrants in the event of diseases which are rare in Iceland and which must be treated.

## **The role of municipalities**

### **Municipal social services**

- Municipal authorities shall ensure that immigrants have the same access to social services as other residents of the municipality.
- Municipal authorities shall employ available measures to prevent the social isolation of immigrants, both children and adults.
- In cases where municipalities establish preventive measures policies, it is vital that such policies also cover children and adolescents of foreign origin.
- Municipalities shall play an active role in all education that is aimed toward preventing prejudice.

### **Child protection**

- Municipal action plan relating to children's welfare issues shall take particular account of children whose native language is not Icelandic.
- Sports and leisure activities.
- Municipalities shall seek ways to ensure the participation of children and adolescents of foreign origin in sports and leisure activities in the municipality, both those organised by the municipality and those organised by associations who enjoy municipal financial support or the use of facilities owned by the municipality.

## **Issues relating to the disabled**

- Diagnosis of developmental disorders in children whose native language is not Icelandic.

## **The core values of Icelandic society**

The cornerstones of the Icelandic Constitution are democracy, human rights, joint responsibility and personal freedom. These values are a guiding light in the integration of immigrants into Icelandic society and the adaptation of Icelandic society to the rapid developments which accompany globalisation.

In a democratic society, it is assumed that differing interests and views are accepted and that their representatives have both the right and the obligation to make them known. The participation of new Icelanders in all fields of society is particularly important. Moreover, the respect of all social groups for the values of democracy must at all times be kept at the forefront.

In times of rapid globalisation, human rights must be respected without exception and no compromises may be made to the requirements Icelanders demand of themselves. As is stated in the Icelandic Constitution, everyone shall be equal before the law and shall enjoy human rights irrespective of sex, religion, opinion, national origin, race, colour, property, birth or other status. Men and women shall enjoy equal rights in all respects.

The quality of life of residents is governed by many factors. Public service institutions play an important role in protecting the quality of life of residents, whether the matter involves the health, security and well-being of the residents or by providing education and ensuring equal opportunity. The institutions, therefore, play a key role in integrating immigrants into society and must undergo continuous development in order to be capable of meeting, at all times, the new needs of residents efficiently.

Personal freedom is among the core values of Icelandic society and one of the prerequisites enabling each and every person to utilise their talent to the fullest extent. Personal freedom thrives best where residents have equal opportunity. Such freedom, moreover, is accompanied by responsibility with respect to the rules of a constitutionally governed state whose foundation is the Constitution of Iceland.

It is the policy of the Icelandic government – approved by the entire nation – to protect the Icelandic language. It is the shared property of the Icelandic nation and contains its history, culture and self-awareness. It is also a tool for social interaction and a key to participation in the nation's life. Powerful support of Icelandic language education for immigrants serves the dual purpose of speeding up their integration into society and strengthening the position of the Icelandic language.

## Foreign nationals in Iceland

From the middle of the 20th century to the mid-1990s, the proportion of foreign nationals in Iceland remained under 2% of the population. Over the past decade, their proportion has tripled and was, in December 2006, approximately 6% of the population according to preliminary figures issued by Statistics Iceland. The increase in the number of people of foreign origin who settle in Iceland for longer or shorter periods can be largely attributed to the high demand for labour and prosperity in Iceland. The EEA agreement, which came into effect in 1994, opened the way for the free right of employment and right of residence of workers, the free transfer of funds within the EEA, mutual access to internal markets and the transfer of social rights. It also opened the way for the overseas expansion of Icelandic companies, and the exportations of intellect and workers to other countries. With the enlargement of the European Union, the number of nations enjoying these mutual rights increases. It must also be pointed out that a Nordic agreement came into effect in 1983, which provided Nordic citizens with the right to work within the Nordic region without a special work permit.

Research into emigration trends has shown that people are most likely to emigrate in early adulthood. The majority of people who come to Iceland are either single or cohabitants with very young children. Once the age of 30 has been reached, emigration numbers generally drop sharply. This indicates that families with children in school are generally less likely to emigrate than families with very young children. The majority of those who emigrated to Iceland in 2005 were in their 20s and, at the same time, the number of children under the age of 5 entering the country was quite high. In 2005, the age distribution of foreign men who moved to Iceland, however, was different, as there were an unusually high number of men in late middle age. The explanation may be found in the temporary demand for labour for the construction of power plants and large industry plants.

In 2002, foreign nationals other than Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and Finns, could, for the first time, vote in the municipal elections and stand for election to municipal council. The condition is that the person in question must have lived continuously in Iceland for at least five years. With this change, Iceland meets the requirements of the convention of the Council of Europe with respect to the participation of foreign nationals in public life in municipalities.

## **Icelandic language education for adults**

The Government plans to ensure that everyone has access to Icelandic language education which is designed to meet the needs of each individual. A prerequisite for integration into a new society and participation therein is the ability to express oneself in that nation's language. Surveys and interviews have shown that the majority of people of foreign origin in Iceland want to learn Icelandic. As a general rule, Icelandic language education for immigrants should include education about Icelandic society, its values, cultural heritage and the rights and obligations of citizens.

Increasingly, work places employing foreign workers offer Icelandic language education in the work place, during working hours. The teaching is often free, and participants are paid partial wages, in some cases full wages, while the courses take place. Such arrangement is considered to achieve the greatest success.

In all Icelandic language education, it must be kept in mind that people have different reasons for learning Icelandic and, at the same time, different abilities to read and understand the Icelandic language. Particular attention shall be paid to people who have had little or no formal education.

The curriculum and educational material for Icelandic language education must be flexible in order to meet the needs of different groups, among other things, according to origin and level of education. Such material shall be composed of units which can be arranged into a larger whole. The principal goal of the curriculum must be to define general performance goals in Icelandic. These could also be taken into account in decisions on the granting of citizenship.

The Ministry of Education monitors the implementation of Icelandic language education in accordance with rules established by the Ministry.

<p><b>Adult immigrants on the labour market as well as outside it shall have access to good education in the Icelandic language</b></p>
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### **Means:**

- Develop a 200-hour course that meets the requirements of immigrants irrespective of their origin.
- Provide grants to educators and companies that fulfil the formal requirements established by the Ministry of Education as regards applications for grants for Icelandic language education for immigrants.
- Students' course costs shall be kept to a minimum.



**Social studies shall form a part of Icelandic language education for immigrants**

**Means:**

- Icelandic language education for immigrants shall, among other things, include an introduction to the basic values of Icelandic society.
- These aspects shall be specifically addressed when educational material is prepared.

**Ensure the availability of educational material appropriate to the goals of the course curricula**

**Means:**

- Provide grants to create and publish educational material for Icelandic language education intended for immigrants.

**Icelandic language courses shall be subject to quality assessment and monitoring**

**Means:**

- The Ministry of Education shall monitor Icelandic language education.
- Courses shall be certified by the Ministry of Education in accordance with quality standards established by the Ministry.

## Dissemination and collection of information

It is the policy of the authorities to ensure that immigrants receive thorough information about Icelandic society and the rights and obligations of Icelandic citizens in order to encourage their successful integration into Icelandic society. The collection of information on immigrant issues is vital for the government, both for policy formulation and to assess the success of actions taken.

### **Immigrants shall have access to information on Icelandic society**

#### **Means:**

- A pamphlet shall be available at all times, in several languages, describing the first steps to take when emigrating to Iceland. It shall, moreover, contain information on where foreign nationals shall register, accessibility to Icelandic language education, etc.
- Immigrants and people residing in Iceland who do not read Icelandic fluently shall have access to such information in several languages on the Internet, among others on the website island.is.
- Information on the first steps to take on the domestic labour market shall be accessible in several languages.

### **Accessible information on immigration issues in Iceland**

#### **Means:**

- Define, in co-operation with Statistics Iceland, the responsibility and sphere of activities of Statistics Iceland and other institutions as regards the collection and publication of statistical information.
- Particular emphasis shall be placed on collecting information on special projects, services and other activities which relate to immigrant issues, from both the state and municipalities.

## Employment issues and employment participation

Paid employment is the basis for people's well-being. Employment participation in Iceland is among the highest in the world, particularly among immigrants, and it is the policy of the authorities that this should remain so.

The Government must, at all times, have an overall view of the number of foreign nationals living and working in Iceland. Furthermore, it is important that individuals are registered in public registration system to ensure that they have access to the Icelandic welfare system to an extent equal to others who legally live here irrespective of nationality.

Foreigners who choose to live and work in Iceland need to register with the appropriate authorities on their arrival and ensure that their residential and work permits are valid while staying in Iceland. To simplify the process and to ensure that all registrations are correct, it is important that the administrative level establish procedures relating to the arrival of foreign nationals in Iceland for the first time.

**Foreign nationals living and working in Iceland shall have the appropriate residence and work permits**

### Means:

- Registration system shall be simplified so that foreigners who have the appropriate permit to come to Iceland, without needing special residential and work permits, can register at a single location at the beginning of their stay.
- Co-operation between different institutions shall be strengthened so that the validity of tax cards and registration in the National Registry is in accordance with the validity of residential and work permits.
- Surveillance of the validity of residential and work permits of foreigners shall be increased and made more visible, among other things through active workplace monitoring.

**Foreign nationals on the Icelandic labour market shall enjoy the same terms and rights as others**

Emphasis is placed on co-operation between the authorities and the social partners with respect to monitoring that applicable laws are complied with, collective wage agreements are upheld and the residential and work permits of foreign nationals working on the Icelandic labour market are valid, among other things to ensure that foreigners keep their rights.

### Means:

- Increase co-operation between the authorities and the social partners as regards monitoring that applicable laws and collective wage agreements are complied with.
- Improve education for employers on the rules applicable to the employment of foreign workers.

### **Active employment participation on the Icelandic labour market**

The general rule applies that workers have free passage within the European Economic Area. With respect to the granting of resident permits with the employment participation of foreign nationals, the established policy is that account shall be taken of circumstances in employment issues within the European Economic Area as current from time to time. The lack of workers on the European employment market is therefore one of the principal conditions for granting foreign nationals permits to reside and work in Iceland. Emphasis shall continue to be placed on the importance of taking account of employment market views, including prospects in employment matters on the employment market in individual sectors, when granting of work permits.

#### **Means:**

- Efforts shall be continued to ensure the access of foreign nationals who have permits to live and work in Iceland to employment sector actions in the event that they lose their jobs on the domestic employment market. Emphasis will be on individually based services, and the active participation of the individual in his search for employment, and the remedies available from time to time.

### **Legislation on the employment rights of foreigners shall be clearer**

#### **Means:**

- Act No. 96/2002 on Foreigners and Act No. 97/2002 on the Employment Rights of Foreigners shall be coordinated.
- There shall be clearer provisions on the right of people to live and work in Iceland during the processing of applications for the renewal of resident and work permits.

### **Dissemination of information on the Internet for employers as well as others**

It is government policy that employers shall be provided with comprehensive information on the first steps immigrants shall take on the domestic labour market in order to make it easier for both employers and immigrants to know and understand the rules applicable on the Icelandic labour market, such as the role of associations of employment sector entities, valid collective wage agreements, communication practices in work places and access to Icelandic language education.

#### **Means:**

- Improve education for employers, among others, through the provision of information on the Internet on the rules which apply to the employment of foreign workers in vacant positions on the Icelandic labour market, whether on the basis of legislation on the employment rights of foreign nationals, the EEA Agreement, the Convention establishing the European Free Trade Association or the agreement between the Government of Iceland on the one hand and the Government of Denmark and the Faroe Islands Home Rule on the other hand.

## Education issues

General education is one of the foundations of democracy and the basis for general welfare. It involves encouraging, in co-operation with households, healthy living practices, strengthening moral values, encouraging responsible treatment of all life and the environment and strengthening respect for the culture of other nations. One of the basic criteria in school work is equality in access to education, which means offering appropriate education and teaching. This does not necessarily mean the same measures for everyone but rather opportunities which are comparable and of equal value. The tasks shall appeal equally to boys and girls, students in rural and urban areas and disabled and non-disabled children, irrespective of origin, religion and colour.

Language knowledge is one of the most important keys to a new society and a fundamental criterion for people's full participation and integration into Icelandic society. Therefore, it is important that those who emigrate to Iceland, and who have a native language other than Icelandic, acquire fluency in Icelandic and learn about Icelandic culture and society.

### **Preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools**

Icelandic language education is an important prerequisite for the integration of an immigrant into society. It is the role of schools, among other things, to assist children from other cultural areas in becoming active participants in a new society.

The goal of Icelandic language education is to ensure that students whose native language is not Icelandic will be able to understand and use the Icelandic language, will be able to study in Icelandic elementary and secondary schools and actively participate in Icelandic society.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Students in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic shall enjoy their right to education in Icelandic as a second language</b></p>
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The arrangement of education in Icelandic as a second language shall take account of the position of preschool and elementary and secondary school students and the fact that their language, cultural experience and knowledge differs from that of students who have been raised in Icelandic culture. Icelandic as a second language involves training in Icelandic and the use concepts. It is also a key to further education and active participation in Icelandic society.

### **Means:**

- The Ministry of Education shall annually allocate budget appropriations for students in secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic.
- The new bill for the act on preschools shall define the right of preschool children of foreign origin to learn Icelandic and to receive the appropriate language training.
- Issue: in 2007, the main curriculum for elementary schools – Icelandic as a second language.
- Issue: in 2007, the main curriculum for secondary schools – Icelandic as a second language.

- Schools shall provide Icelandic children who have lived for a long time overseas with support in Icelandic and the learning of concepts, if necessary.
- Icelandic as a second language shall be evaluated in final examinations in secondary schools.
- Secondary schools shall ensure that supportive teaching in individual courses will become a part of Icelandic language education and that in such teaching, emphasis will be placed on, among other things, understanding Icelandic concepts.
- Support shall be given to the development and publication of educational material to teach Icelandic as a second language in preschools and elementary and secondary schools.

**Students in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools whose native language is not Icelandic shall have the opportunity, as far as possible, of maintaining their native language**

The advantages of the Internet shall be used to access material in the native language and to strengthen communications with students with the same cultural and language background. The important role of libraries should also be pointed out, as many have specialised in different languages.

It is important for students' self-image in preschools and in elementary and secondary schools that account is taken of their fluency in their native language and that attention is not focused solely on their lack of knowledge in Icelandic.

**Means:**

- Give students the option of studying their native language as an optional course of study, wherever possible, or evaluate such studies in another manner as far as possible.
- Recognise the native language of elementary and secondary school students instead of a Nordic language if they have lived outside the Nordic countries during elementary school age.
- Recognise the native language, if other than Icelandic, and evaluate for credits in secondary school as far as possible.

**The taking of examinations in Icelandic in elementary and secondary schools shall be made easier for students whose native language is not Icelandic**

Those who prepare, and are responsible for the implementation of, examinations, whether nationally co-ordinated or not, shall seek to ensure that dual-language students are not at a disadvantage due to limited knowledge in Icelandic.

**Means:**

- Grant elementary school students an exemption from taking the nationally co-ordinated examination in Icelandic in classes 4 and 7, if so requested.

- Grant students an exemption from taking the nationally co-ordinated mathematics examination in classes 4 and 7 if they have lived in Iceland for less than one year, if so requested.
- Grant students an exemption from taking the nationally co-ordinated final examinations in Icelandic and instead allow them to take a special final examination in Icelandic, if so requested.
- Allow students whose native language is not Icelandic to use glossaries during examinations.

**Participation in work related to children and adolescents shall be made easier for parents/guardians of foreign origin**

The education and welfare of students is the joint task of homes and schools. The co-operation between these entities must be based on mutual respect, trust, joint responsibility and mutual exchange of information. Emphasis shall be placed on co-operation between the home and schools as regards the education and welfare of individuals. It is important that schools seek all possible means to invite parents and guardians of foreign origin to participate in parents' work and thus support the education of their children.

**Means:**

- School authorities and teachers shall encourage parents to attend meetings relating to their children, such as parent interviews.
- School authorities and teachers shall place emphasis on strengthening ties with the homes of dual-language children.
- Standardised letters and messages between the school and the home shall be translated into the native language of as many parents who do not speak Icelandic as possible.

**School curricula shall be based on preparing students for active participation in a multicultural society**

**Means:**

- A special enrolment plan shall be prepared for students whose native language is not Icelandic in preschools and elementary and secondary schools in accordance with the main curricula of these school stages.
- Each school shall formulate a procedure for the registration and enrolment of dual-language children. Schools shall, on the registration and enrolment of students, collect information on their background on an appropriate form, among other things on the fluency of the student in the native language and in other tongues.

**Assessment and recognition of foreign professional qualifications and education**

It is vital that immigrants, as well as other residents in Iceland, are able to utilise their education on the labour market.

**Means:**

- The process of assessing and recognising foreign professional education and studies shall be simplified.
- Translate into a greater number of languages information on the manner in which the assessment is carried out, and make such information accessible on the Internet.

### **Teacher's education**

In order for teachers to be able to meet the altered composition of students, it is necessary to train teachers and student teachers to teach Icelandic as a second language.

<p><b>The number of well-educated teachers who have learned to teach Icelandic as a second language shall be increased</b></p>
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#### **Means:**

- Minimum requirements made of teachers in this field shall be defined.
- Student teachers shall receive training during mandatory courses on how to teach Icelandic as a second language.
- Embark on a short-term course campaign to train teachers on how to teach Icelandic as a second language.
- Negotiate with accredited entities, such as university institutions, to handle the education and training of teachers.



## Health care services

It is the principal goal of the Icelandic authorities that Iceland citizens shall enjoy the best possible health care services. This means that each individual's security of person is respected. It furthermore means guarding equal rights, obligations and joint responsibilities in such a manner that in health care services, the individual is approached on his own terms and receives holistic treatment.

The role of health care services is to heal, nurse and provide palliative care when diseases and ill health affect people and to undertake rehabilitation so that each and every person is given the opportunity to live a rich and fulfilling life despite illness or disability. Moreover, it is the task of health care services to help people to strengthen their own health through the provision of information and advice on matters that have an effect on their health.

Article 76 of the Constitution of Iceland states that anyone who so requires shall be guaranteed in legislation the necessary assistance in case of sickness, invalidity, infirmity by reason of old age, unemployment, poverty and similar circumstances. Furthermore, all those who have been domiciled in Iceland for six months or more have medical insurance in accordance with the Act on Social Security; nationality is irrelevant in such case. Those employed in legitimate work in Iceland, moreover, are accident insured from the first day of employment.

The provisions of the EEA Agreement ensure that the citizens of EU and EFTA States enjoy rights equal to those who live in Iceland. However, those who are not domiciled in Iceland and have not lived here for six months after the domicile was registered are not medically insured.

Individuals who are not medically insured in Iceland pursuant to the Act on Social Security and for whom the international conventions on social security do not apply are nevertheless entitled to emergency assistance from the public health system in Iceland.

**Immigrants shall have access to adequate health care services in Iceland in accordance with the Act on Health Care Services, the Act on Social Security and the Act on the Rights of Patients. Immigrants shall enjoy the same services as Icelanders**

Quality in health care services involves all aspects of the services, wherever and whenever they are provided. Thus, they include diagnosis, treatment, nursing, habilitation and rehabilitation, health care and other aspects which prevent health problems and ensure the safety of the patient.

Facilities and treatment shall be in accordance with the condition of the patient and prognosis, and the best knowledge available at each time. Health care employees are under obligation to ensure that all patients receive comparable treatment.

### Means:

- Emphasis shall be placed on the above goals in all study and education for health care staff.
- The management of institutions shall monitor that all the activities of the institution are in accordance with the above goals.

**Language difficulties shall not prevent the exchange of information between the individual and the health care employee**

The right to information is one of the fundamental rights of patients. Act No. 74/1997 on the Rights of Patients provides for the right to an interpreter for persons who do not speak Icelandic. The Act places the burden on health care employees to ensure, as far as possible, that patients who do not speak Icelandic understand what is said to them.

**Means:**

- Harmonised rules of procedure as regards interpreter services shall be established for patients who do not understand Icelandic.
- To simplify communications and to prevent misunderstandings between health care workers and patients, various forms, educational material and instructions shall be translated into foreign languages.
- Definitions shall be prepared for the principal terms used in health care services.

**Health care employees shall be knowledgeable about different cultures insofar as this can be important with respect to immigrants who need health care services**

The fundamental ideology of health care services is based on approaching individuals on their own terms. A health worker's knowledge of the religion and cultural heritage of different groups who seek health care services facilitates the approach, monitoring, treatment and care of patients. Such knowledge serves to increase understanding, co-operation and trust between people and encourages better communications and results.

**Means:**

- In the education of medical workers and life-long learning, the emphasis shall be on showing how differing cultural- and religious-related effects can influence the attitude of the individual, not least when faced with events such as births, illnesses, suffering and death.

**Information on social security and the organisation and structure of health care services shall be accessible for immigrants**

**Means:**

- A pamphlet shall be issued containing practical information on health care services, social security and the rights of patients, as well as how to react in the event emergency services are required.
- Institutions within health care services shall have basic information about their services, and this information shall be accessible in several languages, among other things on the Internet.

**Attention shall be paid to specialised health care issues among immigrants,  
with the aim of improving their health and well-being**

The health care system must be in a position to react to diseases among immigrants and employ specific actions due to immigrants in the event of diseases which are rare in Iceland and which must be treated.

**Means:**

- Emphasis in such health examinations must be defined, as well as who is responsible for their implementation and the treatment of the problems which may be diagnosed.
- Information on particular health risk factors shall be accessible in foreign languages, and educational material about preventive measures and strengthening health shall be systematically disseminated to immigrants in places such as work places and schools.

## **The role of municipalities**

Municipalities and municipal institutions play a key role in encouraging immigrants to participate in society through their close proximity to residents and the basic services they provide. Such proximity provides substantial opportunities in the field of immigration issues. The independence of municipalities generally ensures that they have sufficient flexibility to meet localised needs, given that the origin and number of immigrants in municipalities differs widely. The following text contains recommendations and goals in immigration issues at the municipal level, while at the same time, it is recognised that municipalities must determine their own ways to achieve such goals in accordance with local circumstances. The government encourages municipalities to formulate policies for immigration issues, to determine where the category shall be located within the administration and to seek ways to encourage immigrants to participate in the issues of the municipality and in its social infrastructure. Such policies should provide for the dissemination of information to the residents of the municipality who are not fully fluent in Icelandic and should establish guidelines with respect to interpreter services. Moreover, municipalities are also encouraged to improve information collection relating to immigrant issues and to strengthen local co-operation with employers' associations, organisations, NGO'S and institutions for the benefit of immigrants and for society as a whole.

### **Municipal social services**

The goal of social services provided by municipalities is to ensure financial and social security and to develop residents' welfare on the basis of social assistance. This shall be done by, among other things, improving the standards of living of those in the poorest circumstances, ensuring the developmental security of children and adolescents and taking action to prevent social problems.

**Municipal authorities shall ensure that immigrants have the same access to social services as other residents of the municipality**

**Municipal authorities shall employ available measures to prevent the social isolation of immigrants, both children and adults**

**In cases where municipalities establish preventive measures policies, it is vital that such policies also cover children and adolescents of foreign origin**

**Municipalities shall play an active role in all education that is aimed toward preventing prejudice**

## **Child protection**

The Child Protection Act No. 80/2002 provides for the entitlement of children to protection and care as well as the custodial and upbringing obligations of parents with respect to their children. The goal of the Act is to ensure necessary assistance to children who live in unacceptable conditions or children who pose risks to their health and development. Efforts shall be made to attain the goals of the Act by strengthening the upbringing role of the family and implementing remedies for the protection of individual children when appropriate. The term children refers to individuals younger than 18 years.

The Child Protection Act specifically states that municipalities shall formulate policies and prepare an action plan in the field of child protection within the municipality for each term of office. It is important that such policies take specific account of the children who do not speak Icelandic or who have parents who do not speak Icelandic. Moreover, it is one of the roles of child welfare committees to submit proposals which are intended to ensure that children live under acceptable living conditions and to point out social issues that are contrary to such goals.

**Municipal action plans relating to children's welfare issues shall take particular account of children whose native language is not Icelandic**

## **Sports and leisure activities**

Participation in sports and leisure activities is a way for all children and adolescents to strengthen social relationships and is therefore an effective tool to combat social isolation and risk-taking behaviour. In many places, sports associations and other associations enjoy financial support from municipalities, which gives the municipalities an opportunity to require that the recipients of such support shall seek to ensure equal access to activities operated by them.

**Municipalities shall seek ways to ensure the participation of children and adolescents of foreign origin in sports and leisure activities in the municipality, both those organised by the municipality and those organised by associations who receive municipal financial support or the use of facilities owned by the municipality.**

## **Issues relating to the disabled**

It is vital that children and adolescents among immigrants receive the same services as others in the event that developmental disorders or disability, in whatever form, is suspected. The same applies to adults who may suffer reduction in ability in later adulthood due to illness or accident. The health care system must fulfil its obligations with respect to immigrants as well as others in the case of health care services relating to congenital disability, neo-natal services or diseases which may reduce the abilities of an individual to such an extent that disability ensues. Furthermore, all stages of the school system bear the same obligations towards students with developmental disorders, reduced ability or disability.

On the diagnosis or suspicion of developmental disorder by specialists, it shall be kept in mind that children and adolescents who are not fluent in Icelandic need special attention. General or usual methods are not always appropriate in such cases. This applies, among other things, to specialist services in preschools and elementary schools and elsewhere where such tasks are undertaken. Under such circumstances, it can be e.g. difficult to examine cognitive development. Moreover, social relationships may be linked to cultural environment.

The staff of the health care and school systems, as well as the social services of municipalities, must be on their guard with respect to development disorders in light of the fact that immigrants may not be informed or may be hesitant as regards the options and services available.

<p><b>Diagnosis of developmental disorders in children whose native language is not Icelandic.</b></p>
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**Means:**

- The suggestion shall be made to the person in question that disorders in children's development can be hidden if a child is not as fluent in Icelandic as other children or has a markedly different cultural background.
- Parents shall be informed of the option of an initial diagnosis by a competent specialist in the event of suspected developmental disorders.
- There shall be easy access to interpreter services for immigrants, both where the initial diagnosis is performed and at the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre, where, for instance, information from parents as regards the developmental history of a child can have substantial effects on results. The same applies to counselling and follow-ups. A neutral interpreter service shall be considered, i.e. not interpretation by parents, or, alternatively, seeking the assistance of a specialist of the same nationality as the child who may live in Iceland.