



63th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Statement by

H.E. Ms. Katrín Jakobsdóttir

Prime Minister, Iceland

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Honourable Chair,

I would like start by congratulating you and the team of Ireland for your excellent leadership of this session of the CSW.

Iceland greatly welcomes this year's theme: *social protection systems and access to public services* which is highly relevant, not least considering the forthcoming global Beijing+25 review and the ambitious aim of the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The policies introduced to fulfil the international obligations have played a decisive role in assisting us to make lasting progress and I would like to reaffirm our full commitment to the process.

Iceland has supported and continues to strongly support the stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment as well as its mainstreaming throughout the Agenda. Peace and prosperity, education and wellbeing, work, climate change and the economy, none of these will be reached unless we simultaneously act towards gender equality.

The provision of basic public services, including access to education and basic healthcare services, are essential for gender equality. This includes the right to sexual and reproductive health which is a key element in empowering women and girls to take charge of their own lives.

For the 10th consecutive year, Iceland ranks at the top of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index. We are proud of our achievements, but also aware of the numerous remaining challenges to fully close the gender gap.

This includes a thorough response to the realities revealed by the #MeToo movement, throughout which women spoke up against sexual and gender-based harassment and violence. Violence against women and girls is both the cause and the consequence of wider gender inequalities, and we must do all in our power to end it.

Madame / Mr Chair,

Social Security is one of the cornerstones of the Nordic welfare models. The progress of Iceland and the other Nordic countries did not come about of its own accord. It is the result of a targeted social infrastructure investment, which again underpins the strong economy. It is important to highlight that ending gender inequality is not only the right thing to do, it is also the most sensible thing for the economy.

This has not always been fully recognised: much needed policies, such as universal childcare and shared parental leave, are often deemed too expensive to be implemented. But the costs of sticking to the status quo are higher and we have developed important policies to speed up the progress.

Shared parental leave – with a use-it-or-loose-it proportion for fathers – has transformed Icelandic society, both in public and private life. Fathers are much more active in caring for their children and the old excuse that women cannot be hired or promoted because they will drop out of the labour market no longer holds water. And this is one of the reasons why the labour force participation of women in Iceland is the highest amongst the OECD countries.

In other words, the family friendly policies adopted in Iceland have created *the conditions* in which women can take part in public life and gain economic independence, which is one of the most crucial factor for women's liberation.

We must forge ahead with progressive economic and social policies that defy common stereotypes about costs and benefits and keep on promoting gender equality as part of a forward-looking social justice agenda and as a prerequisite for economic growth.

Thank you Madam/Mr Chair