

Iceland – ANED country profile

The information contained in this summary was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) in April 2009.

Academic networks and resources

[Icelandic Network on Disability Research](#) (INDR)

Icelandic Network on Disability Research is part of the Nordic Network on Disability Research (NDR). Its purpose is to create an arena for discussion, bolster research, collaborative projects and publications, as well as to promote knowledge about issues linked to disability in Iceland.

[Centre for Disability Studies](#), University of Iceland

The Centre is an interdisciplinary site created for research in the area of disability studies in Iceland and which operates under the auspices of the Social Science Research Institute ([Félagsvísindastofnun](#)) at the University of Iceland.

Policy and enforcement bodies

The key national bodies with responsibility for disability law and policy implementation include:

[Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security \(Félags- og tryggingamálráðuneytið\)](#) assumes the overall responsibility for disabled people in Iceland through the [Affairs of Disabled People](#) (Málefni fatlaðra). This is further subdivided into Regional Offices. The disability pension system is administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and [The Social Insurance Administration of Iceland \(Tryggingastofnun ríkisins\)](#).

Organisations of disabled people

The national organisation representing disabled people at the European level (European Disability Forum) is:

The [Organization of Disabled People in Iceland](#) (Öryrkjabandalag Íslands – ÖBÍ)

This organisation consists of [32 member organisations](#)

Other significant national organisations of disabled people include:

The National Association for Intellectual Disabilities ([Landssamtökin Proskahjálp](#))

The Association of Disabled in Iceland [Sjálfsbjörg Landssamband Fatlaðra](#).

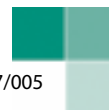
The Icelandic Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted ([Blindrafélagid](#))

Icelandic Association of the Deaf ([Félag heyrnarlausra](#))

National law and strategy

Iceland has signed the [United Nations Convention](#) and the [Optional Protocol](#).

Important national laws, policies and strategies concerning disabled people include:



[Act on the affairs of people with disabilities No. 59/1992](#) (Lög um málefni fatlaðra nr. 59/1992)

The key objective of this law: “The objective of this Act is to ensure to the people with disabilities equality and living conditions comparable with those of other citizens, and to provide them with conditions that enable them to lead a normal life.”

[Social Security Act No.117/1993](#) (Lög um almannatryggingar nr. 117/1993)

This law governs the administration of disability pensions, occupational injury pensions and health insurance.

[Social Assistance Act No. 118/1993](#) (Lög um félagslega aðstoð nr. 118/1993)

This act defines what constitutes social assistance benefits, many of which concern disabled people in various ways. These benefits include: “motherhood and fatherhood allowance, child pension with respect to the education or vocational training of youths aged 18-20, home care benefits, rehabilitation pension, spouse's benefits, widows' and widowers' benefits, household supplement, supplements arising from special circumstances, supplement for the operating costs of an automobile, grants for the purchase of an automobile, and reimbursement for substantial expenses on medical assistance and medicine.”

However, a very recent set of laws have been implemented that are, as of yet, only available in Icelandic. These reflect some recent and important changes to the pension system. One of the most significant changes in recent years was the implementation of the age-related disability pension supplement (*aldurstengd örorkuuppbót*). This agreement between the state and the Organisation of Disabled People in Iceland (*Öryrkjabandalag Íslands*) was made in 2003 and implemented in 2004. This supplement is intended to assist those who have entered the disability pension system at a younger age and who would most likely not have accrued the yearly contributions to pension funds as people who began to receive their disability pensions at an older age. Of equal importance, in April of 2008 the reductions to disability pensions as the result of spousal income were eliminated.

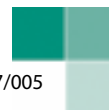
[Social Assistance Act No.99/2007](#) (Lög um félagslega aðstoð nr. 99/2007)

[Social Security Act No.100/2007](#) (Lög um almannatryggingar nr. 100/2007)

The report – Shaping the future: Services for disabled children and adults. 2007-2016 [[Mótum framtíð: Þjónusta við fötluð börn og fullorðna 2007-2016](#)] (Ministry of Social Affairs [Félagsmálaráðuneytið]: 2007 – envisions a number of goals regarding the living standards and inclusion of disabled people that the government of Iceland hopes to achieve by 2016. The report does not, as of yet, have the official status of policy, so its impact remains unclear. Further, given the recent economic events in Iceland it also remains to be seen whether these policy recommendations will be implemented.

Facts and figures

Data on population indicate that:



According to figures from 2008 from the Social Insurance Administration of Iceland (Tryggingastofnun ríkisins), a total of 14,103 people received a disability pension; 651 people received the partial disability allowance; and 1,137 people received a rehabilitation pension.

According to figures from the State Social Security Institute from 2004, the primary causes underlying the awarding of a disability pension were Musculo-skeletal (37.1% females/17.3% males); Mental health condition (28.7% female/37.8% males); Nervous system and Sensory organs (8% females/9.8% males); and Genitourinary system (cancer) (7.4% females/5.8% males).

It is important to note that none of these figures include people over retirement age (67), as people are then moved from the disability pension system to the senior citizen pension system.

Data on employment indicate that:

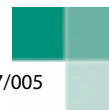
In 2005 the employment rate of disabled people in Iceland was approximately 38%, whereas the employment rate among the general population was well over 80% ([Ólafsson 2005](#)).

The Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland will provide further data on employment issues (forthcoming in 2009). Preliminary findings indicate that the vast majority of disability and rehabilitation pensioners in Iceland (96% of 756 respondents) have been employed in paid work at some point in their lives. However, the employment rates for disability pensioners appear to be in flux, as 71% of respondents had not been employed in the last 6 months at the time of interview.

Data on education indicate that:

Comprehensive large scale quantitative data on education of disabled children and youth in Iceland is not available. There are, however, a number of smaller quantitative and qualitative studies that have focused on children and youth with particular impairments (Marinosson 2007; Egilsson 2005; Bjarnason 2003; Björnsdottir 2003; Traustadottir 2006). These studies indicate that while most disabled students are welcomed into regular schools, there are still incidents where school principals refuse to admit disabled students to their schools. Marinosson (2007) found that the social interaction between disabled and non-disabled children was most successful at the preschool level, but at other levels disabled children were at risk of being socially isolated from non-disabled children and youth. The studies cited above show that although the vast majority of disabled students attend regular compulsory schools, they do not all attend regular classes; some attend special classes for part of or for most of the school day. A small number of special schools can still be found in Iceland.

Thus, the overall picture with regard to education in Iceland is mixed. In his study, Marinosson (2007) points out that the greatest barriers to equal education for students with intellectual disabilities is lack of funds, lack of expert knowledge among teachers, the inability of schools to facilitate social interaction between disabled and non-disabled students, and the fact that teachers' aids are the one's



who spend most of their time with disabled students, not the teachers. Although there is still some resistance to inclusive education among parents and school personnel, the interest in inclusive schools is slowly growing. An indication of this is the establishment of a Center for Research on Inclusive Schooling (Rannsóknastofa um skóla án aðgreiningar) in the School of Education at the University of Iceland in 2008 (see <http://wp.khi.is/skolianadgreiningar>)

Data on accessibility indicate that:

Data on accessibility in Iceland is limited, but some research has been conducted. The University of Akureyri and the Landspítali University Hospital conducted a study with individuals with spinal cord injuries (*Environmental impacts on the daily life of individuals with spinal cord injury* 2009), that identified the most common barriers as being in the physical environment, led by the design of schools and workplaces, followed by the natural environment and transportation. The negative effects of governmental policies also rated significantly in this survey, which included a lack of access to assistive devices and other equipment, lack of personal assistance, as well as inadequate education and employment programs.

Iceland was not included in the [MeAC e-accessibility survey](#)

Data on poverty and incomes indicate that:

Data produced by a number of scholars who have studied the disability pension system in Iceland conclude that disability pensioners trail behind the average incomes and living standards of the nation as a whole.

A study that examined data from the years 1995–2004 shows the situation of single disabled people to be particularly problematic, as “the average earnings of disabled singles have ranged from 48% to 56% of the average earnings of all taxpayers aged 25–65” (Ólafsson 2005). Disabled married people fared only marginally better, earning on average 66–73% of the average incomes for married people in Iceland during these same years.

Other research has demonstrated (Njáls 2006) that disability pensioners in general earned 19–35% below an amount considered to be sufficient for minimum support in Iceland.

Data on attitudes indicate that:

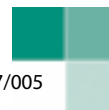
No national data is available at present (Iceland was not included in the Eurobarometer surveys of EU countries on attitudes to disability or discrimination).

Data on public spending indicate that:

In 2007, Iceland’s spending on general social security (including disability benefits, sick pay, and other forms of social assistance) was approximately 4.9% of the GDP ([Tryggingastofnun ríkisins Staðtölur 2007](#)).

Social protection

Key features of the national system include (including adapted items from the [MISSOC](#) database December 2008):



Disability benefits

In 2008, 14103 people received the full disability pension, or 4.4% of the general population, composed of 5473 men and 8630 women respectively.

In 2006, disability benefits accounted for 15.6% of all benefits expenditure (both cash and in kind benefits) compared to an EU27 average of 7.5%, the second highest proportion of any EU/EFTA country (European System of integrated Social Protection Statistics)

General statements about the amounts that individuals may receive from the disability pension system are difficult to make due to the varying situations of individuals. Some of the key disability related benefits, in their maximum yearly amounts and before taxes, are: Basic Disability Pension (Örorkulífeyrir) ISK 351,528; Age-related supplement (full) (Aldurstengd örorkuuppbót 100%) ISK 351,528; Pension supplement (Tekjutrygging) ISK 1,125,708; Household supplement for those who live alone (Heimilisuppbót) ISK 326,904; Child Allowance (Barnalífeyrir) ISK 259,884 (Source: [Tryggingastofnun ríkisins 2009](#))

Rehabilitation and re-training

Vocational training programmes for disabled people in Iceland are operated by disability rights organisations, such as Hringsjá, whereas others, such as the supported employment program AMS (Atvinna með studningi), operate under the auspices of the state through the Regional Offices for Disability Services, though the latter programme is now in the process of being moved over to Vinnumálastofnun, the Directorate of Labour .

Sheltered workshops continue to comprise a significant employment option for disabled people in Iceland, particularly for those with intellectual disabilities. A super-ordinate organisation, SVV (*Samtök um vinnu og verkthjálfun* – The Icelandic Union of Special Employment and Training), has coordinated the work of training institutions and sheltered workshops since 1985. Currently there are over 600 individuals working in the existing 24 sheltered workshops throughout Iceland. However, according to figures from 2003, only 4.4% of disabled people in Iceland received vocational rehabilitation.

Preferential employment and quotas

There is no employment quota scheme in Iceland.

Long-term support and care

State institutional arrangements housing small numbers of people can be found in the form of dispersed and small scale residences in hospitals, rehabilitation centres, nursing homes and other such facilities, usually for people with significant and/or multiple disabilities. However, both private and state run institutions still exist to an extent. An example of the former can be found in a village in the countryside, [Sólheimar](#) (founded 1930), a Camp Hill community, which can perhaps be described as an agricultural commune more so than a traditional institution, and which houses 42 disabled residents out of approximately 100 people in total. An

example of a private but state subsidised institution is that of [Skálatún](#) (founded 1954), a home for 45 individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, what is generally available could be analysed along a continuum, ranging on the one end from having more institutional qualities to the other of independent living.

But it must be noted that while the term ‘independent living’ (*sjálfstæð búseta*) is often used to describe certain housing arrangements in Iceland, in practice what exists markedly differs from the philosophy of the Independent Living Movement (ILM) that emerged from the United States in the late 1960s. These housing arrangements are a municipal concern and overseen by each Regional Office for the Affairs of Disabled People in (*Svæðisskrifstofa málefna fatlaðra*). The following link is an example of one such office in Reykjavík (in Icelandic only – <http://www.ssr.is/>).

Additional information

Useful sources of more detailed information about the situation of disabled people, and the policies and support available, include:

Alþingi (Icelandic Parliament). Social Security Act No. 100/2007 ([Lög um almannatryggingar nr. 100/2007](#))

Social Assistance Act No.99/2007 ([Lög um félagslega aðstoð nr. 99/2007](#))

Bjarnason, D. S. (2003). School inclusion in Iceland: The cloak of invisibility. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Bjarnason, D. S. (2004). Disability and Young Adulthood: New Voices from Iceland. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Einarsdóttir, H. (2009). Ungt blint og sjónskert fólk: Samfélag, sjálf og skóli (Young blind and visually impaired people: Society, identity and schooling). Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press.

Egilsson, S. Th. (2005). School participation: Icelandic students with physical impairments. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

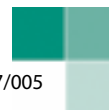
Egilson, S., H. Benediksdóttir, and G. Kristjánsdóttir (2009). Environmental impacts on the daily life of individuals with spinal cord injury. University of Akureyri/Landspítali University Hospital.

Félagsmálaráðuneytið (Ministry of Social Affairs). (2007). [Mótum framtíð: Þjónusta fötluð born og fullorðna 2007-2016](#) (Shaping the future: Services for disabled children and adults. 2007-2016). <http://www.felagsmalaraduneyti.is/vefir/stefnumotun/>

Flóvenz, B.G. (2004). Réttarstada fatlaðra (Rights of the disabled in Iceland). Reykjavík: Mannréttindaskrifstofa Íslands og Minningarsjóður Jóhanns Gudmundssonar.

Heilbrigðis- og tryggingamálaráðuneytið (Ministry of Health and Social Security)

[Lög um almannatryggingar No. 117/1993](#) (Social Security Act Number 117/1993). English <http://eng.heilbrigdisraduneyti.is/laws-and-regulations/nr/35>



[Lög um félagslega aðstoð 118/1993](#) (Social Assistance Act 118/1993).

English <http://eng.heilbrigdisraduneyti.is/laws-and-regulations/nr/36>

Marinossón, G. L. (Ed.) (2007). Tálmar og tækifæri : Menntun nemenda með throskahömlun á Íslandi (Barriers and opportunities: Education of students with intellectual disabilities in Iceland). Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press.

Njáls, H. (2006). Velferðarstefna – Markmið og leiðir til farsældar? (Goals and pathways to prosperity?) In. U. Hauksson, ed. Research in Social Sciences VII. Pp. 103–115. Reykjavík: Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland.

Ólafsson, S. (2005). Disability and welfare in Iceland in an international comparison. Reykjavík: Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland.

Óskarsdóttir, H.K. (2005). Ungt fatlað folk: Sjálfstætt líf, sjálfstæð búseta (Young disabled people: Independent lives, independent living). MA thesis. Reykjavík: University of Iceland, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Óskarsdóttir, H.K., and Kristjánsdóttir, H. (2004). Þjónustumat: Sjálfstæð búseta fatlaðs fólks í Reykjavík. (Program evaluation: Independent living for disabled people in Reykjavík). Reykjavík: Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland.

Svæðisskrifstofa málefna fatlaðra á Reykjanesi (Regional Office for the Affairs of Disabled People in Reykjanes). 2009. [Þjónusta fyrir 18 ára og eldri: Búseta](#) (Services for those aged 18 and older: Residences). Accessed 21.04.2009.

2006. [Ársskýrsla SMFR 2004 – 2006](#) (Annual Report 2004–2006).

Svæðisskrifstofa Reykjavíkur um málefni fatlaðra (Regional Office for the Affairs of Disabled People in Reykjavík). 2004. [Ársskýrsla 2003](#) (Annual Report 2003).

Traustadóttir, R. (2006). Fatlaðir háskólastúdentar (Disabled university students). In Ú. Hauksson (ed), Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum VII (Social Science Research VII) (pp. 315–325). Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press

Traustadóttir, R. (Ed.) (2006). Fötlun: Hugmyndir og adfeddir á nýju fræðasviði (Disability: Ideas and methods in a new field of study). Reykjavík: The University of Iceland Press.

Tryggingastofnun (Social Insurance Administration of Iceland)

[Tölur fyrir árið 2008](#) (Statistical tables for the year 2008).

(2009). [Upphæðir bóta almannatrygginga árið 2009](#) (General social security benefit rates 2009).