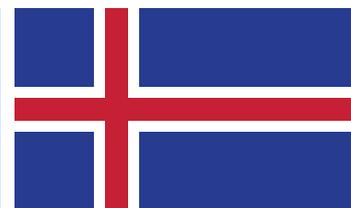




Women in politics: Iceland

Iceland has been ranked as a world leader in gender equality for years. It is frequently cited as a model for political empowerment of women and as a country that values women, giving them support and inspiration to succeed in both their personal and professional lives.

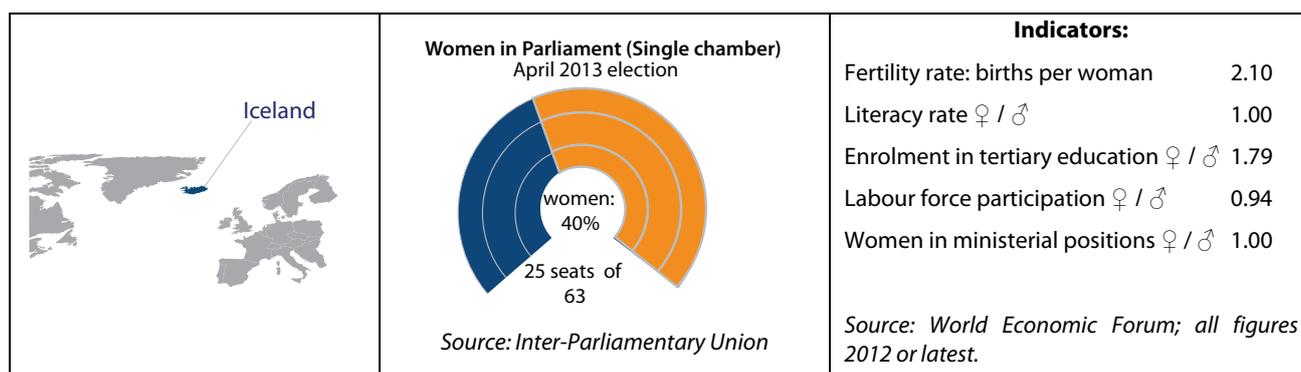


For the past five years, Iceland has topped the rankings of the Global Gender Gap Index. The score is based on good results in terms of political empowerment and educational attainment and on improvements in women's economic participation (including the remuneration gap) since 2011.

Iceland has a history of active feminist movements and progressive female politicians. Women gained the right to hold local office in 1908. The same year, four women were elected to the Reykjavik City Council. Female suffrage was introduced in 1915. Ingibjörg Bjarnason headed a "Women's List" in parliamentary elections in 1922. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was the first woman president of Iceland (1980), and the world's first democratically elected female head of state. In 2009, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir (Social-Democrat Alliance) became Iceland's first female Prime Minister and also the world's first openly lesbian head of government. Her government (up to May 2013) enhanced gender equality (including gender quotas on company boards, prevention of gender-based violence, making the purchasing of sexual services illegal), in addition to stabilising Iceland's economy after the financial crisis.

Iceland has a strong record on women in ministerial level positions (one-third of current Ministers) and at local level (40% of council members since the 2010 municipal elections). Iceland, like other Nordic countries, has a high percentage of women in its parliament (Althing). Voting participation among women has been slightly higher than among men (since 1995). The last elections were held in April 2013, when some 42% of candidates were women. Political parties have voluntary party quotas. According to a study (2011) on gender and power in the Nordic countries, no clear conclusions can be drawn about the link between gender quotas and women's representation in the parliaments, but one effect is the widening of the debate on the issue of women's representation. Women elected in 2013 hold 39.7% of parliamentary seats (42.9% in 2009). Iceland's electoral system is based on proportional representation. This system is said to deliver a much higher percentage of women members of parliament than others.

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Men and Women (2008) aims to promote gender equality in all spheres of society. The Centre for Gender Equality monitors the law closely and the implementation of gender mainstreaming in national policies and activities.



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