



# Consultation on a draft proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution on Matters of Immigrants

16-30 September 2024

The Minister of Social Affairs and Labour will submit to the autumn session of the Icelandic parliament Althingi a draft Parliamentary Resolution on a Policy on Matters of Immigrants for 2025-2038, together with a four-year action plan for the years 2025-2028. The policy has previously been presented in the consultation portal in a so-called white paper with the title *A Society for Everyone – Iceland's future and policy on matters of immigrants*.

This document is a draft of the proposed Parliamentary Resolution, presented for consultation with the public. The proposal is presented in the traditional form of a draft Parliamentary Resolution, beginning with the future vision and objectives, then the key topics, followed by the targets and indicators. These are followed by a National Action Plan, describing the actions proposed to achieve the policy's emphases and in so doing altering the indicators selected. Although the policy itself covers a fifteen-year period, the National Action Plan is for four years, and is therefore only the first of several action plans intended to achieve the goals of the policy.

Should there be any inconsistency between the original Icelandic text and the text in English, Polish or easy-to-read Icelandic, only the original text is authentic.

The following is the text of the proposed Parliamentary Resolution.

## I. FUTURE VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The future vision in matters of immigrants is as follows:

Iceland is a multicultural society that is inclusive and promotes equal opportunities for people to actively participate in society and on the labour market.

In Iceland, immigrants belong to a society which respects diversity and where the public infrastructure purposefully supports the inclusion and participation of everyone in society.

In Iceland, immigrants are given diverse opportunities and motivation to learn and adopt Icelandic as a language, with good and flexible access to practical study of the language.

Iceland's policy on matters of immigrants supports the basic values of Icelandic society, which are based on democracy, equality and respect for universal human rights.

The objectives of the Policy on Matters of Immigrants are as follows:

1. Immigrants belong to and are active participants in an inclusive society, based on diversity and equal opportunities.

2. Society ensures that the infrastructure meets the needs of different social groups, including different groups of immigrants, and communicates information in an accessible way.
3. For both children and adults, learning Icelandic follows varied routes, is motivating, professional, practical and accessible, so that it meets the communication needs of immigrants and society, in everyday life, in education and on the labour market.

## II KEY TOPICS

Work will be done on the following ten key topics on matters of immigrants:

1. Ensure good and effective information services for immigrants about rights and obligations in Iceland.
2. Improve teaching of Icelandic as a second language, ensure access to a variety of instruction for different age groups and equal access throughout the country.
3. Manpower needs on the Icelandic labour market are defined and predictable, to attract qualified workers from both within and outside the EEA.
4. Simplify and improve assessment of previous education and work experience of persons educated abroad, to enable them to obtain suitable jobs and the society to benefit from the education and experience of those who move here.
5. Aim for an inclusive society, where immigrants are always expected to participate in all areas of society.
6. Ensure the involvement of immigrants in decision-making on matters of immigrants.
7. Reduce poverty among immigrants.
8. Promote democratic participation, protect human rights and equality for immigrants.
9. Strengthen research on matters of immigrants and refugees and improve registration and gathering of data to facilitate long-term improvements in the quality of services founded on a knowledge base and measurable targets.
10. Ensure support for refugees so that they can establish themselves here and rebuild their lives. Emphasis is placed on support for the most vulnerable groups of refugees.

The emphases and actions of the Policy on Matters of Immigrants are aimed at dealing with the above-mentioned issues and thus contribute to the realisation of its vision and objectives.

## III TARGETS, EMPHASES AND INDICATORS

The government's targets in matters of immigrants will be:

- 1.1 Immigrants are active participants in democratic elections in Iceland and their participation is comparable to that of the society as a whole.
- 1.2 Immigrants have opportunities equal to those of others for social participation.
- 1.3 Attitudes towards immigrants are positive, and there is good understanding among the general public of the terms multiculturalism and inclusion.
- 1.4 Poverty among immigrants is not be greater than in the society in general.
- 1.5 Immigrants are employed by both the state and local authorities.
- 1.6 The diversity of the society is visible in public media.
- 2.1 Effective and diverse information services for new residents.
- 2.2 Strong and early support for refugees.

- 2.3 Studies at foreign institutions are assessed for professional qualifications in Iceland, and validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants.
- 2.4 Active research on matters of immigrants and dissemination of research results.
- 2.5 The Icelandic education system meets the academic and social needs of children and youth with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all school levels.
- 2.6 The situation of immigrants on the housing market is comparable to that of others in the society.
- 3.1 The supply of practical instruction in Icelandic is good and reaches all areas of the country.
- 3.2 The quality of Icelandic instruction is guaranteed.
- 3.3 There is understanding and an incentive to use Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born.
- 3.4 Instruction in Icelandic is accessible and flexible.
- 3.5 The evaluation system for Icelandic language skills is harmonised.

The indicators for evaluating progress towards the targets will be:

- 1.1 Voter turnout of immigrants in local government elections, elections to the Althingi and the election of the President of the Republic is equal to the voter turnout of native-born. The percentage of immigrants on candidate lists and among democratically elected representatives in local governments and in the Althingi is comparable to their percentage in society together with the number and proportion of Immigrant Councils consulting with the state and local authorities with over 5,000 inhabitants.
- 1.2 a) The percentage of immigrant children and native-born children participating in sports and leisure activities is equal. b) The employment participation rate of immigrant women and native-born women is equal. c) The employment participation rate of refugees five years after being granted protection is equal to the overall labour force participation rate. d) The percentage of immigrants of total unemployment and long-term unemployment is not higher than the percentage of immigrants in the population. e) The percentage of immigrants from the group of young people aged 16-24 who are neither in education, employment or vocational training (NEET) is not higher than their percentage of the population. f) A study is conducted of the well-being and social participation of immigrants.
- 1.3 The results of the opinion survey *Attitudes of the General Public on Matters of Immigrants*, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has had carried out every 2 years.
- 1.4 a) Proportion of immigrants with low incomes and b) poverty gap within the group of immigrants living in poverty.
- 1.5 a) Percentage of immigrants in central government jobs by job category and b) percentage of immigrants in jobs with local authorities by job category.
- 1.6 a) Immigrants as a percentage of interviewees in RÚV radio and television broadcasting; b) percentage of immigrants involved in creating programming for RÚV; and c) immigrants as interviewees on RÚV radio and television, with a breakdown by whether the interview concerns immigration or other issues.
- 2.1 Number of people who use the information services of the Directorate of Labour, with a breakdown by type of communication (digital traffic, phone calls, inquiries, visits);

- and b) a survey of whether immigrants know about, use and feel they need the information service.
- 2.2 a) The proportion of refugees granted protection each year referred to co-ordinated refugee reception; b) the proportion of refugees who receive instruction in Icelandic or Icelandic sign language in the first year after being granted protection and the average number of lessons per person; c) the proportion of refugees who receive community education in the first year after being granted protection; and d) the proportion of refugees who receive support in the assessment of their previous education, study counselling and/or job search assistance in the first year after protection.
- 2.3 a) Speed of procedure for the evaluation of studies by profession; b) proportion of approvals and rejections of recognition of professional qualifications from foreign institutions by profession, as well as a review of the reasons for rejection; c) percentage of educated immigrants performing jobs that do not require specific education compared to native-born; d) immigrants as a percentage of those who complete validation of competence; e) percentage of immigrants with limited formal schooling on the unemployment register who undergo validation of competence.
- 2.4 a) Funding for research on matters of immigrants is maintained in line with the number of immigrants in Iceland; b) the number of studies published on matters of immigrants each year; c) a special forum, which keeps track of research on matters of immigrants and refugees, is active and disseminates knowledge of the research in Icelandic society.
- 2.5 a) The results of PISA, the Icelandic Youth Survey and other assessment tools used in the education system; b) students graduating at secondary and supplementary level by background, age group and gender; c) students graduating at university level and with doctoral degrees by background, age group and gender; and d) number of schools that offer children's native language study as an optional subject or as a substitute for compulsory study under the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory and secondary schools.
- 2.6 a) Percentage of immigrants in the rental market compared to native-born; b) percentage of immigrants in their own housing compared to native-born; c) percentage of immigrants on the rental market who receive housing benefits in comparison to native-born; and d) percentage of immigrant households in arrears on their housing mortgages or rent compared to the percentage of native-born households.
- 3.1 a) The number of courses, study places and study options, including distance learning, offered at different skill levels in each region of the country relative to the number of immigrants residing in the region; b) that courses in Icelandic sign language are offered for deaf immigrants and the number of workplaces offering work-related Icelandic learning; and c) the percentage of immigrants who have access to such studies of those active on the labour market by geographical area.
- 3.2 a) Percentage of teachers who have teaching qualifications and specific training in teaching Icelandic as a second language; b) percentage of courses that assess learning outcomes based on the proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; c) a user evaluation of the quality of instruction will be conducted twice during the implementation period of the policy.

- 3.3 A comparative study will be carried out every four years on the attitudes of native-born and immigrants towards opportunities to use Icelandic and attitudes towards Icelandic interlanguage.
- 3.4 a) The number of distance learning places available relative to the number of immigrants; b) the supply of Icelandic lessons at different times of the day in different regions of the country relative to the number of immigrants in each region; c) the number of open smart solutions that support the learning of Icelandic and the use of the language.
- 3.5 a) A standardised, official placement test, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is offered at test centres throughout Iceland; b) continuing education providers will assess and confirm the proficiency of each student upon the conclusion of a course, based on the skills levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; c) immigrants have access to free, on-line, sample tests, where they can check their level of proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

#### IV NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

To ensure progress towards the targets of the policy, work will be carried out in accordance with the following National Action Plan. The actions taken to achieve the targets will be the following:

##### **1.1 - Immigrants are active participants in democratic elections in Iceland and their participation is comparable to that of the society as a whole**

###### *1.1.1 Democratic participation and democratic education*

*Target:* To encourage immigrants to participate in democratic elections and provide education on democratic organisation and governance in Iceland.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Immigrants who become eligible to vote and stand for election are automatically sent information about their acquired right and educational materials about the organisation of and arrangements for the various elections in Iceland and how to exercise their right to vote.

b) Education for children and youths on democratic elections, their nature and arrangements as provided for in the National Curriculum Guide. Regard will be had for the development project Education, Reception, Culture [Icel. *Menntun, móttaka, menning*].

*Responsibility:* Registers Iceland (for part a) of the action) and the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs (for part b) of the action).

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Local authorities, the National Electoral Commission, Digital Iceland, Ministry of Infrastructure, Children's Ombudsman, Directorate of Education and School Services (MMS), preschools, compulsory schools and secondary schools.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants who have acquired the right to vote and stand for election, children and youth.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Adult immigrants are aware of their right to vote, eligibility to stand for election and the basic arrangement of governance in Iceland. Children and youth from the immigrant group know the right to participate in elections, understand the structure of democracy and its implementation in Iceland.

## 1.2 – Immigrants have opportunities equal to those of others for social participation

### 1.2.1. Activity and opportunities on the labour market

*Target:* Equalise opportunities for immigrants on the labour market, promote active and sustainable employment participation of different groups with appropriate support and education.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Support especially people with language barriers or limited work experience to connect them with the world of work and educate them about opportunities on the labour market.

b) Education about rights, duties and workplace culture on the Icelandic labour market.

c) Cooperation with business and industry and education to enterprises about the benefits of assessing immigrants' education, the characteristics and advantages of a multicultural work environment and opportunities for increasing the mobility of immigrants on the labour market.

*Responsibility:* Directorate of Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Social partners, National Association of Local Authorities, State Personnel Policy Department.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants of working age, the labour market.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Greater equality prevails on the labour market, as immigrants have opportunity for diverse jobs and both horizontal and vertical mobility on the labour market.

### 1.2.2. Participation of children and young people in sports, youth and other leisure activities

*Target:* Increase the participation of children and young people of foreign origin in organised sports and youth activities, as well as other leisure activities, and reduce their drop-out rate from such activities.

*Implementation/description:* Projects will be launched that have proven to be successful both in Iceland and in neighbouring countries in order to promote and increase the participation of children and young people of foreign origin in sports, youth and other leisure activities.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* National Association of Local Authorities, Icelandic Youth Association (UMFÍ), National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland (ÍSÍ), preschools, compulsory and secondary schools and music schools, sports clubs, art schools and NGOs working in the field of children and youth affairs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Children and youth with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their families.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Immigrant children and youth enjoy the same opportunities as other children and youth to learn and develop in activities outside of traditional schoolwork.

### 1.2.3. Research on the well-being and social participation of immigrants

*Target:* Immigrants' own assessment of their well-being, opportunities and obstacles regarding social participation is known and the development of the situation is monitored.

*Implementation/description:* A participation survey on immigrants' assessment of their own well-being, opportunities and obstacles with regard to social participation will be carried out every four years, first in 2026.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Research parties, National Association of Local Authorities, NGOs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants, the government and various service organisations.

*Period:* 2026.

*Conclusion:* Knowledge of the well-being of immigrants, as well as their opportunities and obstacles to social participation. The results of the study provide a basis for formulating actions that contribute to improving or maintaining well-being, and for strengthening the opportunities and social participation of immigrants as appropriate, based on the results of the study.

### **1.3 – Attitudes towards immigrants are positive, as is understanding among the general public of the terms multiculturalism and inclusion**

*1.3.1 The opinion survey “Attitude of the General Public on Matters of Immigrants” will be carried out regularly.*

*Target:* To monitor and respond to developments in public opinion towards matters of immigrants in Iceland.

*Implementation/description:* An opinion survey of the general public, based on previous surveys from 2017, 2019 and 2023, in addition to which a survey with supplementary questions will be carried out at two-year intervals, next in 2025.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Experts in the field of social science research, Statistics Iceland, the academic community, local authorities and the Directorate of Labour.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Society, policy makers, experts in the field of social science research.

*Period:* 2025 and 2027.

*Conclusion:* The results of regular measurements of attitudes will serve as the foundation for targeted actions to increase understanding of matters of immigrants which are designed to counter negative attitudes.

*1.3.2. Strengthen the educational role of the Multicultural Department of the Directorate of Labour*

*Target:* Accessible educational material on multicultural sensitivity, the status of immigrants in Iceland, the social benefits of equal status for residents regardless of origin and the characteristics of an inclusive society and the strength of diversity in the workplace, will be available.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Educational materials for workplaces and NGOs.

b) Preparation of accessible digital educational material and instructions on inclusive practices in different social situations.

c) The educational material *The Settler* [Icel. *Landneminn*], community education about Icelandic society for immigrants, is accessible to all immigrants and presented effectively.

*Responsibility:* Directorate of Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* NGOs, the social partners, local authorities, government agencies and immigrants.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Society as a whole.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Increased awareness and understanding of how to contribute to an inclusive society and the role of each person in that regard.

#### **1.4 – Poverty among immigrants is not greater than in the society in general**

##### *1.4.1. Social factors that counteract poverty and the marginalisation of immigrants*

*Target:* The specific factors that contribute to poverty and marginalisation of immigrants are known, together with actions to counteract poverty and marginalisation.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Mapping and analysis of the dominant factors causing and combating poverty and the marginalisation of immigrants.

b) The situation of immigrants is analysed specifically in the regular Survey of Income and Living Standards (EU-SILC) by Statistics Iceland, i.a. based on family type.

*Responsibility:* The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (for point a) of the action) and Statistics Iceland (for point b of the action).

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Universities, local authorities, NGOs

*Stakeholders/target group:* Poor and/or marginalised immigrants.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Targeted actions can be developed to reduce and prevent poverty and the marginalisation of immigrants to a greater extent than other groups in society.

#### **1.5 – Immigrants are employed by both the state and local authorities**

##### *1.5.1. Public jobs accessible to all*

*Target:* That everyone enjoy equal opportunities to work for public bodies on a competitive basis, focusing on qualifications and ability for advertised jobs, where origin does not affect employment opportunities.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Work on an analysis and targeted recording of the diversity of human resources at state and local authority level, by status as immigrant and by profession.

b) Hiring practices at central and local government level are examined with regard to equality based on origin, and proposals for improvements are made if necessary.

c) Job advertisements state clearly what level of Icelandic proficiency applicants must have achieved based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Statistics Iceland, the state Personnel Policy Department, the National Association of Local Authorities.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Society as a whole.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Public sector workplaces are workplaces where diversity prevails, they are inclusive and utilise the strength of diversity in society.

#### **Effective and diverse information services for immigrants**

##### *2.1.1. Building diverse and effective information services for immigrants*

*Target:* To increase access to and use and utilisation of already existing information and educational materials by a larger group than is currently the case. Through targeted



presentation, it is made easier for immigrants to obtain information and have a clear idea of where information can be found.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Strengthening the provision of information digitally through the web portal island.is. Information will be available in languages other than Icelandic, and special attention should be given to targeted presentation of basic information to persons who have recently moved to the country with a special page in so-called “major life events”.

b) Increasing active and diverse information services and community education for immigrants that reaches people throughout Iceland.

c) A complete revision of the community education material in *The Settler* so that it is useful for both immigrants in general and refugees.

d) Effective promotion and marketing of the information services in points a) and b) so that immigrants are familiar with the services. Institutions.

*Responsibility:* Directorate of Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Digital Iceland, public and service providers, local authorities.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants, especially those in their first years of living in Iceland

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Practical, comprehensive and user-friendly information service on the main fundamental issues concerning rights and obligations in Icelandic society.

## **2.2– Strong and early support for refugees**

### *2.2.1: Strong and early support for refugees*

*Target:* To guarantee refugees services from the time protection is granted, with the aim of empowering them and helping them put down roots in a new society.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Specific additional support for refugees beyond the support provided through general social services.

b) Analyse the need and nature of necessary services for refugees on the basis of design thinking, where the user’s routes through and needs in the system are mapped and developed in steps and with prioritisation of services as a guide.

c) Prepare and establish peer support for refugees.

d) Training of staff working with refugees in multicultural sensitivity and a trauma-informed approach in services and support for refugees.

e) Social and activity actions intended for refugees, to strengthen communication with society as a whole, encourage social connections and create opportunities to use Icelandic in diverse situations as support for learning Icelandic.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Directorate of Labour, local authorities, the National Association of Local Authorities, NGOs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Children’s Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, healthcare institutions, secondary schools and universities.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Persons granted international protection or residence permits for humanitarian reasons, professionals who provide them with services.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* A more streamlined, more efficient and improved service for refugees based on users' assessment of their own needs.

### *2.2.2: Support for the mental health of refugees through psychological support*

*Target:* Refugees receive the necessary psychological support to deal with the experience of being a displaced person, with the aim of supporting their mental health and ability to cope with life in a new country and reducing the likelihood of the need for specialist mental healthcare services.

*Implementation/description:*

a) General trauma care is available in a co-ordinated reception centre and psychological support is available to all refugees in the form of group sessions rather than individual sessions.

b) A clear referral system to appropriate healthcare services at the right level for refugees who need specialised treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Ministry of Health, local authorities that receive refugees, healthcare institutions and NGOs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Refugees in Iceland.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Refugees are better equipped to build their lives in a new country, and most can access mental health services at lower levels. Challenges that can be addressed with psychological support are not referred to more specialised services within the mental health system.

### *2.2.3: Ready access by refugees to evidence-based treatment for PTSD*

*Target:* Refugees receive the necessary evidence-based medical treatment for PTSD that has developed as a result of their circumstances and experience as a displaced person.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Evidence-based treatment for PTSD is made available to all refugees in need, on the one hand, through a co-ordinated reception centre and, on the other hand, under the responsibility of suitable healthcare institutions.

b) Ensure training and mentoring for professionals who provide evidence-based treatment for PTSD related to the consequences of displacement or the circumstances from which people have fled.

c) A clear referral system to appropriate healthcare services at the right level for refugees who need specialised treatment for PTSD.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Health.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, local authorities that receive refugees, healthcare institutions and NGOs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Refugees in Iceland.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Refugees are better equipped to build their lives in a new country, and most can access mental health services at lower levels.

#### 2.2.4: Reception of and support for unaccompanied children

*Target:* To strengthen child protection services to receive and service unaccompanied children and increase predictability in services provided to them. To support the specialisation of child protection services with the most experience in developing and providing such services.

*Implementation/description:* Co-operation agreements on services for unaccompanied children.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Local authorities' child protection services, the National Agency for Children and Families, National Association of Local Authorities, local authorities' school services, Directorate of Education and School Services, secondary schools, lifelong learning centres, sports and leisure clubs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Unaccompanied children.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Targeted and effective services for unaccompanied children.

#### 2.2.5: Support for local authorities for the reception of refugee children

*Target:* To develop and implement a procedure aimed at ensuring that all children who have come to Iceland in search of protection have unimpeded access to appropriate integrated services.

*Implementation/description:*

- a) Support for local authorities for the reception of refugee children and services for them.
- b) A pilot project on special support for children with a refugee background and the development of procedures based on the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* local authorities, National Association of Local Authorities, Directorate of Education and School Services, National Agency for Children and Families, secondary schools.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Refugee children and their families.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Targeted and effective services for refugee children and their families.

#### 2.2.6: Icelandic instruction and community education for refugees

*Target:* To support people in gaining a basic command of Icelandic and an understanding of Icelandic society and social structure.

*Implementation/description:*

- a) Strong emphasis on Icelandic instruction at the start of the residence permit, designed for adult refugees with varying learning needs, is guaranteed.
- b) Community education through *Landneminn* for adult refugees is made available to all refugees.
- c) Mapping the diverse needs of refugees for Icelandic instruction and community education, which lays the foundation for what type of learning is offered to each person and for determining the optimal means of assessing the academic status, needs and abilities at the start of studies.

*Responsibility:* Directorate of Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* education providers, local authorities that receive refugees, NGOs.

*Stakeholders/target group:* adult refugees.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* All adult refugees are given the opportunity to acquire a basic command of Icelandic and gain an understanding of the main characteristics of Icelandic society, the services of public bodies and the rights and obligations of citizens.

### **2.3 – Studies from foreign institutions are assessed for job qualifications in Iceland, and validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants**

#### *2.3.1. Study at institutions abroad is evaluated for professional qualifications in Iceland.*

*Target:* That the education and skills that immigrants have acquired will be assessed and used as merited on the Icelandic labour market, and that professional qualifications will be granted for legally protected professions. Immigrants will receive information about what additional training/education needs to be acquired in order to obtain professional qualifications and to equalise the position of persons on the labour market regardless of origin.

*Implementation/description:*

a) To further develop a common educational assessment portal that is easy to use and accessible to people regardless of origin.

b) Set up formal collaboration between the social partners aimed at increasing opportunities for immigrants to obtain work in Iceland suited to their education and improve co-operation between professional groups in assessing foreign education.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Social partners, continuing education providers, secondary schools and universities.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants who have education and qualifications but perform jobs where their education and experience are not utilised. Employers and society as a whole.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* The position of immigrants and native-born on the labour market will be more equal, immigrants will perform jobs suited to their education, and both employers and society as a whole will benefit from the education and experience of immigrants.

#### *2.3.2: Validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants with limited formal education.*

*Target:* The skills that immigrants have acquired through employment will be assessed and utilised as merited in the Icelandic labour market and in the education system. Create opportunities for immigrants for further education and equalise the position of people on the labour market regardless of origin.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Map the implementation of validation of competence projects among immigrants and how such assessment has been useful to them for further study or work.

b) Make validation of competence better known among immigrants in Iceland and promote dialogue between stakeholders about efficient ways for individuals to have their competence validated.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Directorate of Labour, continuing education providers, secondary schools, the social partners.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants who have limited formal education but experience in employment who want to utilise their skills as a basis for further studies and employment opportunities. In addition, employers who have the opportunity to utilise better the skills of their employees.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* The position of immigrants and native-born on the labour market will be more equal, immigrants will perform jobs suited to them, have opportunities for further education and specialisation, and both employers and society as a whole will benefit from the education and experience of immigrants.

## **2.4 – Active research in the field of immigration and dissemination of research results**

### *2.4.1. Research, data gathering and knowledge sharing*

*Target:* Establish a forum for pooling of research and dissemination of knowledge about matters of immigrants in this country. A bridge should be built between the knowledge gained through research, the necessary recording of data and the utilisation of research results directly in services to immigrants. Knowledge gaps in the field are recognised.

*Implementation/description:*

a) A knowledge forum will be established and the implementing party will be responsible for maintaining an overview of research and practical projects in matters of immigrants, for disseminating the results of research/projects and analysing in what areas further knowledge and research is needed, in line with the government's policy.

b) Analysis of where it is necessary to improve the collection, co-ordination and registration of data, such as statistical data to facilitate research, comparison of research and analysis of different issues concerning immigrants in Iceland.

c) A conference for professionals on the development of matters of immigrants held twice during the period of validity of the action plan, in 2025 and 2027.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Statistics Iceland, the academic and scientific community, especially in the field of social and educational sciences, researchers, local authorities, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, Immigrant Councils, Rannís – the Icelandic Centre for Research and the Directorate of Labour.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Researchers, immigration service providers and the university community.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* A stronger knowledge community in matters of immigrants and more effective use of research results and project experience.

### *2.4.2: Improved access to statistics on immigrants in Iceland*

*Target:* To improve access to timely and comparable statistical data of good quality on the situation of immigrants in Iceland and its development, to support research and public policy-making on the issue.

*Implementation/description:* Based on a draft overview of data on immigrants, opportunities for improvement in the data infrastructure will be defined and proposals made for necessary improvements in those institutions responsible for collecting and disseminating, among themselves and to the public, statistical data on immigrants, together with cost estimates.

Subsequently, a plan will be drawn up for the dissemination of these statistics, where quality and consistency will be guaranteed.

*Responsibility:* Prime Minister's Office.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Statistics Iceland, Registers Iceland, the Directorate of Immigration, Directorate of Labour, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, local authorities and healthcare institutions.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Policy makers, the university and research community, immigrants and society as a whole.

*Period:* 2025-2026.

*Conclusion:* More reliable and comparable statistics on the situation of immigrants in Iceland that are accessible to all stakeholders.

## **2.5 – The Icelandic education system meets the academic and social needs of children and youth with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all levels of education**

### *2.5.1: Harmonised procedures for the reception, education and inclusion of children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds nationwide*

*Target:* Develop and ensure the educational community is equipped with effective advice, study materials and tools, as well as specific support for resolving more complex situations.

*Implementation/description:* Support and services will be developed regarding:

- a) Icelandic as a second language;
- b) inclusion and multicultural education;
- c) literacy counselling and status assessment;
- d) parental co-operation;
- e) education and professional development of teachers and other staff;
- f) development and distribution of study materials and other tools.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Directorate of Education and School Services, local authorities, the National Association of Local Authorities, universities, the educational community, the Icelandic Teachers' Union, Home and School Association, Móðurmál – the Association on Bilingualism.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their families.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Support, advice, study materials and related tools are available all over the country with a focus on local authorities' school offices, preschools, compulsory and secondary schools and leisure activities in the local environment of children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### *2.5.2. Increasing publication of educational material for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds*

*Target:* Appropriate study materials are available at all school levels.

*Implementation/description:* Following the introduction of the Act on Educational Materials:

- a) the Educational Materials Development Fund and the Educational Materials Fund will be strengthened;

b) emphasis will be placed on the publication of educational materials for Icelandic as a second language;

c) tools will be made available for the adaptation of learning materials for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Directorate of Education and School Services, National Association of Local Authorities, the educational community, Icelandic Teachers' Union.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Pupils with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and their teachers.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* A variety of study materials in Icelandic for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds will be available throughout Iceland.

### *2.5.3: Development and expansion of the secondary educational options for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds*

*Target:* To increase the educational opportunities of children and young people with a diverse linguistic and cultural background, to equalise the percentage of those who begin secondary school study with that of students with an Icelandic background and counteract their dropping out of secondary school.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Secondary schools develop programmes that meet the needs of children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

b) Revision of the National Curriculum Guide for secondary schools.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Directorate of Education and School Services, secondary schools, the Icelandic Teachers' Union and the academic community.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Children and young people of secondary school age with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* A revision of the National Curriculum Guide for secondary schools has been carried out and the educational options offered by secondary schools meet the needs of children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

## **Target 3.1 – The supply of practical instruction in Icelandic is good and reaches all areas of the country**

### *3.1.1: Icelandic instruction is made diverse and effective for everyone*

*Target:* Ensure access to diverse Icelandic instruction throughout the country, where the cost of participation is not an obstacle and information about entitlement, obligations, study materials and the quality of teaching is made public. Icelandic instruction is available in the local environment or through distance learning with effective support. Improved Icelandic language skills encourage activity and employment.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Immigrants' right to learn Icelandic will be guaranteed, their obligation to complete Icelandic courses clarified, and their contribution to the cost of such course reduced.

b) Access to work-related instruction in Icelandic will be increased and people enabled to learn and practice Icelandic as much as possible during working hours.

c) The development and publication of learning materials for adult Icelandic teaching, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, will be accessible to everyone teaching Icelandic as a second language.

d) Work will be carried out in collaboration with local authorities, schools and education providers on an Icelandic bridging program for adults, with an emphasis on parents of primary school children.

e) Work will be done to develop the teaching of Icelandic sign language as a second language.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, the University of Iceland, the University Centre of the West Fjords, education providers, the National Hearing and Speech Institute of Iceland, the Icelandic Association of the Deaf, local authorities, the National Association of Local Authorities, teachers at different educational and school levels and their associations.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants who are learning Icelandic as well as business and industry.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Instruction in Icelandic as a second language is diverse, progressive and accessible throughout the country. The supply of study material is good and the latest technology is used to impart knowledge and enable practice in use of the language.

### **3.2 – The quality of Icelandic instruction is ensured**

*Action 3.2.1. Increasing the professionalism of teachers who instruct in Icelandic as a second language*

*Target:* Increasing the number of teachers with professional knowledge in teaching Icelandic as a second language for adults with increased access to specialised university studies that can be taken in parallel with teaching duties.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Work on increasing the number of teachers graduating with expertise in teaching Icelandic as a second language.

b) Clarify and promote study options at university level, in order to increase the professionalism of teachers of Icelandic as a second language based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages at all school and educational levels.

c) User evaluation of the quality of Icelandic instruction for adults carried out in 2027.

*Responsibility:* The Ministry of Higher Education, Industry and Innovation (a and b) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (c).

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Universities, recognised education providers, the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, the National Association of Local Authorities, teachers at different educational and school levels and their associations.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Immigrants, schools and educational institutions, business and industry.

*Period:* 2025-2028.



*Conclusion:* Increased professionalism in teaching Icelandic as a second language at all school levels contributes to more graduates and better Icelandic language skills. Teachers with specialised education, qualifications and training in teaching Icelandic as a second language are instructing in primary and secondary schools as well as in the majority of programmes and courses aimed at adults. Teachers have the qualifications and skills to apply the criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in teaching and in assessing students.

### **3.3 – There is understanding and an incentive to use Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born**

#### *3.3.1. Icelandic as the language of communication for all*

*Target:* Increase opportunities for the use of Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born and create opportunities for language learning and support in day-to-day communication and specifically in the public sector.

*Implementation/description:*

a) A special two-year project aimed at increasing tolerance of the diverse use of Icelandic and increasing the use of Icelandic in communication with immigrants in Iceland will be carried out 2025-2027.

b) Specific support for socially important projects that promote the use of Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born.

c) Research on the attitudes of native-born and immigrants regarding opportunities to use the language and attitudes towards Icelandic interlanguage, conducted at the end of 2027 or at the beginning of 2028.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* The Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs, Immigrant Councils, the Directorate of Labour, NGOs, accredited education providers, schools, the Association of Local Authorities.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Society as a whole.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Immigrants feel that they have the opportunity to use the language and have the support of native speakers of Icelandic in speaking and writing in Icelandic.

### **3.4 – Instruction in Icelandic is accessible and flexible**

#### *3.4.1: Diversity of Icelandic instruction*

*Target:* A wide variety of routes to learn Icelandic is available to meet the different learning needs and educational backgrounds of the participants. Learning will be as individualised and flexible as possible. There is oversight of the variety of routes for learning Iceland and the role and responsibility of the implementing and financing bodies is clear.

*Implementation/description:*

a) Development projects in learning Icelandic for shift workers and Icelandic language instruction for immigrants who do not have access to childcare for children under compulsory school age, either on-site or as distance learning.

b) Work will be done to support the further development of smart solutions that are entirely open to the public providing practice in Icelandic for immigrants.

c) Summarising the definitions and pedagogical knowledge needed to support individualised adult learning and flexibility in the implementation of instruction.

*Responsibility:* Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

*Examples of co-operating partners:* Universities, technical and educational enterprises, Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV), schools and education providers, local authorities and specialised professional organisations.

*Stakeholders/target group:* Adult immigrants, especially who are shift workers, live in non-urban areas or are not active on the labour market due to having young children not in day care.

*Period:* 2025-2028.

*Conclusion:* Opportunities for different groups with more limited opportunity to attend traditional and local language courses are increased and a wider group receives instruction and training in Icelandic.

## Explanatory notes

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Policy on Matters of Immigrants

This is the first policy on matters of immigrants and is intended, by presenting a clear vision for the future, to lay the foundation for a future social structure in Iceland where diversity of the population is always assumed. For a society that builds on the potential of every individual to participate actively in society and the involvement of different groups in decision-making about a common future. A clear future vision is laid out, with objectives that are followed up on with targets and longer-term indicators, and set in motion with a National Action Plan that addresses the key challenges facing Icelandic society in matters of immigrants. The policy can be expected to influence future policy formulation in various areas with a view to creating an inclusive social structure, including infrastructure and services which reflect the diversity of the society.

Icelandic society is facing rapid demographic changes, as the percentage of immigrants in the total population is growing faster than in any other country in the OECD. This creates a number of challenges in various areas, and strategic planning is therefore key in co-ordinating actions in different areas, ensuring the best possible support both for immigrants themselves as well as the infrastructure needed to promote an inclusive society. The Policy on Matters of Immigrants is intended to ensure that the needs of immigrants are systematically taken into account on an equal basis with others, that people are offered equal opportunities, that human resources are utilised and that it is clear what demands are made on people and the society as a whole.

#### 1.2. Co-ordination of policies and plans

Active policy making is a prerequisite for progress, and it is important to have an overall view of policy making in overlapping fields. Therefore, it is important to ensure the co-ordination of existing plans and new ones, covering all the fields concerned, so that both resources and imagination can be used optimally to promote cost-efficiency and efficacy, while at the same time providing good services and achieving results.

The policy on matters of immigrants is linked to a large number of fields, as these issues affect all aspects of society. The policy is directly related to the Education Policy for 2020-2030, the Regional Development Programme 2022-2036, the Parliamentary Resolution on a Strategic Plan for Local Government for 2024-2038 and the action plan for the years 2024-2028, the proposed urban policy and the Action Plan for the Icelandic Language 2023-2026.

Co-ordination with these plans consisted primarily of broad co-operation and dialogue during the drafting of the policy and action plan, involving an examination of how these plans support each other and work towards common goals. Doing so should bring benefits, as it creates opportunities for better use of funds, increased transparency and co-operation between areas on common priorities and actions.

### 2. Key topics of the policy on matters of immigrants

Work on the status assessment of matters of immigrants, which was presented in the Green Paper in November 2023, included analysing key topics of the issues. To address the challenges identified, work will be directed at the following ten key topics:

*2.1. Ensure good and effective information services for immigrants and refugees about their rights and obligations in Iceland*

Information is an important part of modern society and creates a basis for active participation. Immigrants in Iceland point to the importance of this and opportunities for improvement in the field of information sharing. Therefore, work will be done to strengthen counselling services for immigrants as the first point of contact for people looking for information. Initial efforts in this direction have been in development for the past few years, but need to be expanded substantially to ensure availability throughout Iceland. Electronic dissemination of information about rights and obligations in Icelandic society needs to be increased and made available through a single portal. In tandem with this, public institutions need to ensure access to information and services both in easy-to-understand language and in languages other than Icelandic. Opportunities exist to utilise key locations that have contact with many immigrants in a targeted manner for information dissemination, and it is clear that diverse methods must be used to reach a diverse group.

*2.2. Improve teaching of Icelandic as a second language, ensure access to a variety of instruction for different age groups and equal access throughout the country*

The right of immigrants to Iceland to learn Icelandic has not been ensured in the same way as in other Nordic countries, and Iceland needs to move towards rectifying this. It is evident that instruction in Icelandic for immigrants of all ages needs to be greatly strengthened. Instruction in Icelandic needs to be strengthened for both children and adults with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the case of adults, the creation of future arrangements needs to take into consideration their needs and suggestions regarding learning Icelandic, and emphasise user consultation. Instruction in Icelandic should be based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its implementation ensured. In tandem with this it is necessary to reinforce the education of and support for teachers who teach Icelandic to immigrants and boost the production of teaching materials at all levels of Icelandic instruction. For long-term success, special support is needed for the education of young immigrants, to combat secondary school dropping-out, and learning opportunities for need to be created for young people with intermittent schooling.

*2.3. Manpower needs on the Icelandic labour market are defined and predictable, to attract qualified workers from both within and outside the EEA*

Participation in the labour market and the opportunity to provide for oneself and one's family creates the basis for life in a new country. Giving a view of the long-term prospects for people moving between countries increases the competitiveness of countries, and it is therefore important for Icelandic society to know the future labour market outlook. Short- and long-term forecasts of manpower needs on the labour market must be available, in part so that people moving to Iceland have clearer information about their future employment prospects. At the same time, the granting of work and residence permits needs to be characterised by transparency, fairness, trust and efficiency, preferably based primarily on digital solutions. Effective utilisation of human resources creates a basis for the prosperity of societies, but in Iceland a large number of immigrants work in jobs that do not fully utilise their previous education and knowledge. Targeted efforts need to be directed at analysing and assessing the education and experience of immigrants who are already on the Icelandic labour market. Their knowledge and experience should be utilised in the best possible way and opportunities

created for them for further education and professional development. In the longer term a link also needs to be created between the granting of work permits and the assessment of professional qualifications in the case of certified occupations or those requiring professional qualifications. This can both boost Iceland's competitiveness while increasing economic and social prosperity.

*2.4. Simplify and improve assessment of previous education and work experience of persons educated abroad, to enable them to obtain suitable jobs and the society to benefit from the education and experience of those who move here*

Recently, a portal was established where it is possible to apply in a single location for evaluation of studies from foreign schools, regardless of whether the studies are academic or vocational. It is necessary to further reinforce this portal and the support necessary for immigrants in applications for assessment of studies, ensure the prompt and efficient assessment of foreign studies and professional qualifications, and strengthen validation of competence. No detailed analysis of the economic benefits to the national economy of improving the assessment of previous education and work experience has been carried out, and it is necessary to understand better the value of such measures.

*2.5. Aim for an inclusive society, where immigrants are always expected to participate in all areas of society*

Since in the past fifteen years Icelandic society has encountered some of the biggest demographic changes in its history, it is necessary to think about public services in a new way. Immigrants make up about one-fifth of the population and forecasts expect their number will continue to increase during the policy period. Public services therefore need to be arranged to allow people who speak little or no Icelandic to access services on an equal basis with others. An inclusive society must be concerned with society as a whole and harmony within it, which is mainly achieved through education that promotes tolerance for diversity. At the same time, it must be ensured that immigrants have access to good education on Icelandic society, and that the responsibility for maintaining such education and its dissemination are clear. In the case of children and young people, the educational opportunities for children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds must be equalised and their participation in leisure and social activities increased. It is also evident that the current legal framework on matters of immigrants needs a comprehensive review.

*2.6. Ensure the involvement of immigrants in decision-making on their own issues*

The involvement of different groups in decision-making on their own issues is an important part of democratic governance. Active participation in shaping society for the future usually begins with the strengthening of civil society, where individual groups have strong advocates. Although various immigrant associations are active in Iceland, their voices have not been strong enough, and it is clear that immigrant associations need to be effectively supported. It is also necessary for the state and local authorities to co-operate in examining how consultation with immigrants can be formalised, in a manner similar to arrangements in

seniors' affairs, with Joint Committees on the Affairs of the Elderly and youth councils for children's and youth's affairs.

### *2.7. Reduce poverty among immigrants*

Immigrants are among the most vulnerable groups in society when it comes to poverty. They are also more likely to live in chronic and deeper poverty than comparable groups of native-born. Reducing poverty among immigrants involves integrated actions in many areas, both related to their position on the labour market, assessment of previous education and work experience, and their knowledge of social rights and entitlement to public support, such as housing benefits or leisure activity grants. Hiring obstacles need to be reduced to ensure that immigrants enjoy equal opportunities for public sector employment and assessment of previous studies and work experience needs to be both simplified and improved. Young immigrants must be given a good start in life with greater access to and support for their education, so that they stand on an equal footing with their native-born peers.

### *2.8. Promote democratic participation, protect human rights and equality for immigrants*

In a democratic society, it is important that discussion of different issues is open to everyone. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to combat prejudice based on origin, religion and race, including all forms of hate speech. This is, furthermore, based on the society's commitment to democracy, equality and respect for general human rights. Gender equality will be a guiding principle and the position of immigrant women on the labour market must be examined in particular. Work is needed to combat honour-based violence (HBV) and negative social control, while strengthening support for victims of violence and working on preventive measures against violence. Immigrants who experience multiple discrimination, such as due to disability and their status as immigrants, will be given special attention. By directing efforts towards greater understanding and tolerance between different groups in society, democratic participation of immigrants can be increased, both in terms of the right to vote, political participation and opportunities to influence society.

### *2.9. Strengthen research in the field of immigrants' and refugee issues and improve registration, harmonisation and gathering of data to facilitate long-term improvements in the quality of services founded on a knowledge base and measurable goals*

By international comparison, Iceland has a relatively brief experience of large numbers of immigrants, and changes in the composition of the population have been more rapid, especially during the last two decades. The development and strengthening of professionals handling different areas of immigration therefore has only made limited progress and the OECD has identified various opportunities for additional publication of official statistics on immigration to make them comparable with available data from other OECD countries. The first step is to identify the need for documentation and work on improvements and harmonisation of data regarding immigrants among public institutions. To strengthen work in this area it is also necessary to establish a research forum and the dissemination of research in matters of immigrants and refugees, and in so doing boost the utilisation of research results. Working on these aspects contributes to the development of services and the necessary basis

for setting the measurable objectives that are necessary to implement policies and increase efficiency and responsible handling of funds.

*2.10. Ensure support for refugees so that they can establish themselves here and rebuild their lives. Emphasis is placed on support for the most vulnerable groups.*

Matters concerning refugees who have received international protection in Iceland and those refugees who have been specifically invited to the country by the government are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. In recent years, efforts have been made to coordinate support for the aforementioned groups through co-operation between the Ministry, institutions, local authorities and NGOs. Knowledge of refugee issues has increased markedly and the foundation has been laid for a support system based on the Nordic model. Efforts in this direction need to continue, together with further development of the knowledge network in services for refugees and support for the reception of refugees, focusing especially on the most vulnerable groups. With regard to mental health, there is specific cause to reinforce work with refugees by emphasising a trauma-informed approach in services to refugees and access to mental health services for those who require it. More opportunities need to be created for the refugees who have taken root here to provide support for others who come to Iceland by strengthening peer support among refugees. Iceland will continue to receive vulnerable groups at the invitation of the Icelandic government.

### **3. Future vision, objectives targets and indicators**

#### *3.1 Future vision*

The altered composition of the country's population calls for the development of a clear vision for Icelandic society in the future and targeted efforts to strengthen equality and promote equal opportunities for all residents. Without a clear vision of the future, there is a risk that decisions will be haphazard and arise as a reaction to challenges rather than being aimed at achieving a specific type of social structure and equal opportunities for all individuals. The future vision in matters of immigrants addresses one of the biggest demographic and social changes the nation has ever faced. It also presents a ground-breaking vision, in the spirit of what is customary in the other Nordic countries, to promote Icelandic as a language of communication that immigrants are enabled to learn and enjoy the support of society to do so. At the same time, the future vision implies the possibility of thriving in diversity, where no one is excluded, while at same time diversity lays a common foundation for a single social whole.

Without a vision for the future with clear targets and actions, there is a risk of a widening gap in Iceland between native born, on the one hand, and immigrants, on the other. The Green Paper and the key topics that were analysed there show that there is some inequality between native-born and immigrants that cannot be explained solely by the challenges involved in moving between countries. This is clearly visible in national data as well as in data from the OECD, where Iceland can be compared with various other countries regarding the situation of immigrants. Without a policy and actions, there is a risk that instead of one community, class division in Iceland will increase and two separate communities will form that will not enjoy the same opportunities to create a future for themselves and live an independent life, based on respect for human rights.

### 3.2. Objectives

To connect the future vision to defined targets, specific objectives are presented. They describe specific results that are to be achieved, are conceived with a view to the long term and are subjective, i.e. they are not based on quantitative indicators like the targets which accompany them. Each objective has been derived from different themes or ideas that were intended to get to the core of the key topics. The themes of the objectives are Participation and Diversity (Objective 1), Information, Access and Services (Objective 2) and Communication and Language (Objective 3). Thus, the first objective is linked to key topics 5, 6, 7, 8; the second objective to key topics 1, 3, 4 and 9; and the third objective to key topic 2. The future vision and objectives are also linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as the global goals are universal and the goals of the Policy on Matters of Immigrants are part of their implementation. The SDGs which are linked to the Policy on Matters of Immigrants include SDG 1, No Poverty; SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being; SDG 4, Quality Education; SDG 5, Gender Equality; SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 10, Reduced Inequalities; and SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Objective 1: Immigrants belong to and are active participants in an inclusive society, based on diversity and equal opportunities. This means, in effect, the following:

- a) In Iceland, immigrants belong to a society based on inclusion and multiculturalism.
- b) Equality, equal rights and general human rights are the cornerstones of an inclusive society, which recognises diversity and plans for it in ensuring the active participation of all groups in society.
- c) Respect is shown for diversity in society, which is a driving force of progress in the development of modern societies.
- d) An inclusive society acts to combat inequality and poverty.
- e) Inclusion is a force that encourages participation, as immigrants are given equal opportunities with others and are encouraged to actively participate in the shaping of the society. The public sector leads the way in this regard, with its policies and legislation.

Objective 1 is based on participation and diversity, which form a basic pillar of an inclusive society. Emphasis is placed on the principle that responsibility for an inclusive society lies not only with immigrants but with society as a whole. Its connection to the future vision is therefore obvious, as the main focus there is on an inclusive social structure and the participation of everyone in society, where the infrastructure and social structure promote equal opportunities, regardless of origin.

Inclusion is about belonging and the creation of one society for all, where people of various origins form one whole. For this to happen, care must be taken in decision-making not to exclude individual groups of the society from participation, but rather aim for the opposite. Efforts will be made to create equal opportunities and systematically encourage the participation of those who are putting down roots in a new society.

A glance at the key topics shows that, under the current situation, participation in society is not equal among native-born and immigrants, with the latter clearly in the weaker position. This is described in the Green Paper's discussion, for instance, regarding poverty among immigrants, in the division of income into deciles, in the percentage of immigrants who work in jobs not suitable for their education and in the electoral participation of immigrants.



Whether a society is inclusive or not is partly a subjective assessment, based on people's own experience as to whether they feel they belong to a society and enjoy equal opportunities. However, there are many tangible things that have a direct impact on this, and it is clear that systematic efforts are needed to remove the obstacles immigrants face in Iceland so that they have opportunities equal to those of native-born. Some of these challenges are similar to those of other countries, while others are more specific to the Icelandic context. The small scale of the society offers an opportunity to achieve rapid change, but also underlines the importance of taking advantage of the experience of other nations, of learning from their mistakes and finding ways to adapt to local conditions the actions that have proven successful elsewhere in order to strengthen an inclusive social structure.

Objective 2: Society ensures that its infrastructure meets the needs of different social groups, including different groups of immigrants, and communicates information in an accessible way. This means, in effect, the following:

- a) Access to information is a basic prerequisite for immigrants to enjoy opportunities on the labour market and in all areas of society.
- b) Information about Icelandic society, rights, obligations and public services is accessible to immigrants and presented in plain language and in several languages. The dissemination of information is of various types, efficient, builds on communication and takes into account the needs of different groups with varying degrees of, or even no, knowledge of Icelandic.
- c) Social infrastructure adapts to the changes and needs of society at any given time. Infrastructure in this context refers to public services of the state and local authorities in Iceland.
- d) Actions to shape the society are based on research and data about the situation of people who live there, which makes it important that data on immigrants in Iceland is analysable and reliable.
- e) Education and job experience obtained abroad is valued appropriately on the Icelandic labour market and in other areas of society where it is of significance. Assessment of foreign education and job experience is available, efficient, transparent and clear.
- f) Forecasts on the manpower and skills needs of the Icelandic labour market support immigrants' access to the labour market.

Objective 2 concerns information, access and services, emphasising infrastructure that systematically supports inclusion, i.e. that promotes opportunities and removes barriers related to access to information and other basic services which are key to living in a society. This objective lays the foundation for people to gain a foothold in Icelandic society. Ready access to information increases people's independence, equalises opportunities and contributes to a more sustainable society. A large part of public services involves access to information, and here the emphasis is on ensuring that services reach everyone and support the needs of different groups. That people have opportunities to obtain information and gain an understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the society.

By focusing on the recognition of immigrants' education, attention is paid to the well-being of immigrants as well as that of society as a whole. Education is an investment, and it is therefore in society's interest to be able to make the best use of that investment for the

benefit of the , individual and the society. Furthermore, by creating predictability for those who intend to settle in Iceland, with a clear vision of the manpower and skills needs of the labour market and therefore of the future outlook in individual industries, a longer-term view is taken. Evaluation of education is a major issue for access to a society that immigrants want to take part in shaping, and that the society needs to use for the future.

By prioritising research, together with the gathering and dissemination of data, emphasis is placed on creating a knowledge base for progress and promoting well-grounded decision-making. There are many opportunities in this area, as well as simple ways to improve the expanding field of study.

Objective 3: For both children and adults, learning Icelandic follows varied routes, is motivating, professional, practical and accessible so that it meets the communication needs of immigrants in the society, in education and on the labour market. This means, in effect, the following:

- a) There are two national languages in Iceland, Icelandic and Icelandic sign language.
- b) The Icelandic language is a cultural heritage that needs to be protected so that everyone enjoys equal opportunities in society.
- c) Communication between people, and the language, are the keys to participation in society.
- d) Immigrants are guaranteed access to diverse and flexible instruction in Icelandic, as well as incentives for active use of the language.
- e) Access to language learning is guaranteed regardless of residence, and standard criteria for language skills are systematically applied to create predictability and understanding of the requirements for language ability in society.
- f) Special emphasis is placed on the quality of instruction in Icelandic as a second language at all school levels.
- g) The success and utilisation of Icelandic instruction at different levels is closely monitored.

Society is about communication and language is one of the keys to communication. Participation in society is based on the possibility of communicating, and therefore the third objective of the policy is based on the future vision that immigrants have diverse opportunities and motivation to learn Icelandic and Icelandic sign language. In discussions held with immigrants themselves throughout Iceland in preparation of the objectives that appear here, Icelandic was one of the main topics of discussion. Immigrants want to learn Icelandic, but feel that they lack the opportunity and motivation to learn the language, and that immigrants in rural areas have far too few opportunities to learn Icelandic. To create such opportunities and motivation, clear targets are set for the supply of instruction and access, with an emphasis on flexibility. Immigrants in Iceland are a very diverse group and therefore no single study option suits everyone. Variety also makes learning more enjoyable, which creates motivation to continue learning. In tandem with this, it is important that the society as a whole show understanding and provide encouragement to use the language. As Icelandic skills are only of use in Iceland, it is important that people see an advantage in learning the language. Icelandic is important to the nation and a symbol of unity and cultural heritage. For most Icelanders, their native language is part of the nation's identity, and therefore it is important, in an inclusive society, to bear in mind that Icelandic is many things. It is a route to communication

and participation in society, and skills in the Icelandic language and Icelandic sign language are therefore important to everyone who lives here, both immigrants and native-born.

Iceland, unlike the other Nordic countries, has not built a strong support network for teaching Icelandic as a second language. This also means that teaching Icelandic as a second language as a specific teaching subject has yet to grow, and offers many opportunities. Iceland is at a certain turning point and major efforts in this regard have already been announced, among other things with an action plan concerning Icelandic language and work on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Therefore, the emphasis here is on setting clear targets for the quality of instruction and the evaluation system. Such targets treat both students and teachers with respect and create opportunities for development and research, while emphasising language skills and use. Learning Icelandic takes place not only in classrooms, but also through active use of the language and opportunities to learn, both through play and work.

### 3.3 Target and indicators

The targets of the policy are formulated under the three objectives; each target is accompanied by indicators to measure progress towards it during the policy period. There are seventeen targets in total.

#### 3.3.1 Target 1.1 Immigrants are active participants in democratic elections in Iceland and their participation is comparable to that of the society as a whole

The right to vote, and thereby the opportunity to directly influence who controls the society, is a basic right in a democracy. Only those immigrants who have acquired Icelandic citizenship have the right to vote in parliamentary elections, presidential elections and referendums. In elections to local authorities, Nordic citizens have the right to vote, if domiciled in the municipality, and other foreign citizens if they have had a continuous domicile in Iceland for at least three years prior to election day. The same provisions apply to the eligibility to stand for election and therefore possible candidature for a seat in the Althingi or local government. Turnout, however, is not only dependent on the right to vote but also on social variables such as immigrants' assessment of their own Icelandic skills and length of stay in the country, as increased language ability and longer residence increase the likelihood of voting.

Both state and local government in Iceland are based on representative democracy, with emphasis placed on having elected representatives reflecting a cross-section of the nation or local authority. To achieve such a target, immigrants need to have representatives both in local government as well as in the Althingi in the same or a similar proportion as their proportion in society. One way to reach immigrants better and ensure their involvement, on an equal footing with others, in decision-making is to consult special Immigrant Councils. Although this is not mandatory at the local government level, it is a good way to reach more residents.

It is clear that in order to change the current situation, targeted actions must be taken to educate people about their rights and mobilise interested immigrants to participate in politics. In this way, society as a whole can share a vision of democratic values and the social framework shaped by decisions at local government level and legislation in the Althingi. If the participation of immigrants remains as low as is currently the case, there is a risk of increased marginalisation and a gap between native-born and immigrants.

### *3.3.2. Target 1.2 - Immigrants have opportunities equal to those of others for social participation*

The opportunity to participate in society affects people's well-being and their experience of their position in society. Active involvement increases well-being, which makes people more resilient in the face of challenges and setbacks. Social participation has a multifaceted preventive value for both physical and mental health. For children and youth especially, participation in sports and leisure activities is important to strengthen their social skills and self-image. Organised sports and leisure activities have expanded in Iceland in recent years and are now part of the environment of most children in the country. There are many indications that, for immigrants, participation not only strengthens social skills and self-image, but is an important link in the children's language learning and enhances their Icelandic skills.

When young people find themselves outside of education and work, it can have a long-term impact on their opportunities and job prospects for the future. Being inactive can lead to social isolation, increasing the likelihood that young people will end up both socially and financially impoverished. Therefore, it is important to carefully monitor and mobilise especially young people who find themselves in this situation in order to prevent their marginalisation in the long term.

For adults, employment is one of the cornerstones of social participation. Participation of immigrants in employment is considerably higher in Iceland than in other Nordic countries. This must be considered one of the strengths of Icelandic society and the labour market with regard to social inclusion factors. It should be kept in mind that refugees occupy a certain special position due to their status, and in general their employment participation five years after granting of protection is lower than that of other immigrants. The reasons for this include previous traumas, in addition to the Icelandic government's emphasis on welcoming particularly vulnerable groups. Despite the high employment rate of immigrants, there are many indications that they are more likely to lose their jobs than native born and that their position on the labour market is more precarious (see further Section 3.6.4 in the Green Paper). Targeted measures to counter barriers in the labour market therefore will lead to a more equal situation.

Specific assessment of the well-being and social participation of immigrants is anticipated. Such a survey has not been carried out, with the exception of a survey on the well-being and social participation of immigrants among senior citizens, which the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour commissioned in 2023.

By working with key aspects of social participation and activity, possible marginalisation can be counteracted, and the quality of life and well-being of immigrants increased. People's activity in one area increases the probability of their activity in other areas, boosts well-being in general and therefore comprises social capital. The actions that fall under Target 1.2 are diverse, but the emphasis here is on the above-mentioned aspects, i.e. leisure and activity of children and young people and employment of adults.

### *3.3.3. Target 1.3 - Attitudes towards immigrants are positive, as is understanding among the general public of the terms multiculturalism and inclusion*

Whether people experience a society as inclusive or not depends largely on the attitudes that they encounter or experience. This applies to both immigrants and native-born, and it is therefore important that people who move to Iceland feel welcome and part of the society. Furthermore, it is important that those who live here feel that immigrants are and should be part of a society that takes advantage of the qualities of diversity.

By measuring attitudes regularly, any change can be detected in attitudes that could lead to the marginalisation of immigrants and present an obstacle to the future vision of the policy in this regard. The current survey measures people's attitudes towards the number of immigrants and their impact on society and the economy. It is important to develop the attitude survey further to include more variables and thus provide a deeper comparison. Regular assessment offers an opportunity to respond to the results in a targeted way through action plans, if the development of attitudes in society is negative. Here the frequency of assessment is of considerable importance, and measurements are expected every two years, the next one in 2025.

#### *3.3.4 – Target 1.4 - Poverty among immigrants is not greater than in the society in general*

Poverty comes with social costs, both in the short and long term. Poverty reduces the quality of life and people's possibilities for an independent life. The government aims to reduce poverty in general and, due to the analysis of the vulnerable situation of immigrants in terms of poverty, developments among immigrants with regard to poverty must be monitored specifically. In the case of immigrants, there is a direct link between poverty and their position on the labour market, including the assessment of education, their possibility of receiving instruction and improving their skills in Icelandic, knowledge of their rights and social participation. The indicators and the actions necessary to alter the current situation are therefore related to other indicators of the policy. Without targeted efforts to equalise the situation of immigrants and others when it comes to poverty, the risk of multiple discrimination will increase, together with the marginalisation of immigrants and poorer opportunities for immigrant children who are living in poverty.

#### *3.3.5. Target 1.5 - Immigrants are employed by both the state and local authorities*

Equal opportunities on the labour market are particularly important in creating an inclusive society. In public sector policy it is important that the state and local authorities lead by example and that their employees reflect the diversity of the society. In their human resource policies, public bodies will consider factors that can create obstacles for individual groups, such as immigrants, and how they can be countered. Such an approach also offers an opportunity to utilise better the education and human resources among immigrants. Currently they are more likely than native-born to perform jobs where their education and work experience are not utilised, despite their education level being comparable to that of native-born, according to OECD data. The diversity of the society needs to be reflected in government and local government jobs.

#### *3.3.6. Target 1.6 - The diversity of the society is visible in public media*

Visibility is part of creating role models and has major social significance. As a public service medium, Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV) has a greater role to play towards the public than other media, and also an opportunity to pave the way and to be a force for positive change, in addition to which RÚV's policy reflect the diversity of society. As a public service medium RÚV communicates news, information, culture and arts both on radio and television and on the Internet. RÚV is therefore an ideal platform for visibility and key to increasing immigrants' use of the content communicated to the country's population. RÚV does this, among other things, by ensuring that different groups in society are visible and have a voice. It is essential that a public service medium reflect the diversity of society and work in the interest of all groups that can place their trust in the organisation's work. By measuring

the visibility and participation of immigrants as interviewees in RÚV's programming, an opportunity is created to work systematically to reflect diverse attitudes, including those of the rapidly growing group of immigrants in Iceland.

### *3.3.7. Target 2.1 - Effective and diverse information services for new residents*

When they take up residence in Iceland, it is important for immigrants to be able to obtain information about the society, their rights and their obligations simply and effectively. Various practical information about basic services are important initially in a new country and serve as guidance to the system. With longer residence, the need for information changes until the person no longer needs specific support in obtaining information.

Information is empowering and increases people's independence, enabling them to make informed decisions about both major and minor aspects of their lives. In the open dialogue of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour with immigrants throughout Iceland, the latter placed strong emphasis on efficient information provision in order to gain entrance to society as soon as possible. It was repeatedly mentioned how complicated and time-consuming it was to obtain the necessary information. A single information portal, giving access to state and local government institutions responsible for public services, can make it possible to ensure that immigrants have equal access to reliable information. Lack of access to information can lead to misunderstandings and increase the risk of information being passed on by word of mouth and from the experience of others. This increases the risk of information being misused and wrong instructions being given, which could affect the legal status of the person in Iceland, for instance, with regard to rights related to legal domicile.

### *3.3.8 Target 2.2 - Strong and early support for refugees*

All the Nordic countries have some type of system to support the inclusion of refugees and assist them in establishing themselves in a new country. The view is that because of their situation refugees, more than other immigrants, need specific support to take their first steps in a new society. In Iceland, such services are provided in collaboration with social services, the Directorate of Labour and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that form a continuum of support for reception of refugees. There the support, as is generally the case in social services, is tailored to the needs of each user. The goal of the service is to ensure that refugees receive the necessary assistance to overcome trauma and have the opportunity to actively participate in society, whether in the labour market, in education or in other areas. It is therefore important to measure the participation in such an extensive support project. Most refugees are assumed to need such support, although some portion of refugees can always establish themselves without specific support. It is also important that the support is strong at the start of residency, which explains the emphasis on referrals within certain time limits. Instruction in Icelandic, community education and support in finding employment supplement the work of social services, but are also available to all refugees, regardless of whether they receive assistance from social services or not, and it is therefore desirable that these actions be specifically monitored. Children, however, always receive support through the school system, regardless of whether their guardians receive support in the reception of refugees, and that support falls under Target 2.5.

The risk of not providing early support to refugees is that, without support, it is more likely to take longer for people to become established and active in society, and their employment participation is likely to be lower. This can ultimately increase the likelihood that people will

never become part of society and will need long-term welfare services with associated costs for the individuals and society.

*3.3.9. Target 2.3 - Studies from foreign institutions are assessed for job qualifications in Iceland, and validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants*

Studying is an investment, both on the part of the student and the state that pays for the education system enabling such study. It is important to make the best use of this investment, for the benefit of society as well as the individual. The fact is that many immigrants have difficulty getting their degrees, education and work experience properly evaluated in Iceland. A lengthy period may be required for evaluation and in some cases hampers the possibility of hiring immigrants for work suitable to their education and experience. The target is related to Target 2.1, as people must have clear information and instructions on where to look for evaluation of studies. It is also worth noting that the indicator for this target does not cover the fifth pillar of the education system, i.e. continuing education and validation of competence or immigrants' access to it.

Recently, a single service portal was opened for evaluation of studies in Iceland, where application can be made for evaluation of studies in vocational subjects as well as university studies. To measure the benefits of that action and to continue to promote the evaluation of studies, indicators need to be established. Doing so also provides an opportunity to measure any deviations which may arise in evaluation of studies and thus strengthen the evaluation system and make it more efficient.

In Europe in general, there is some difference between immigrants and native-born in the percentage of educated people who perform jobs that do not require specific education. It is estimated that within the EU, about a third of immigrants are in this situation, which is about 12% higher than among native-born. However, this gap is among the largest in the Nordic countries and is very high in Iceland, as 35% of immigrants are in this situation compared to 11% of native-born. It is therefore evident that a large number of people working on the Icelandic labour market do not take proper advantage of their education, and it is a great loss for society not to be able to utilise the education of people who are already active on the labour market. Here there are definitely opportunities for improvement.

The risk exists that, if the evaluation process is time-consuming and complicated, the foreign experts that the Icelandic economy needs will prefer to settle in other countries, as the competition for knowledge is high. If left unchanged, the system can therefore have a negative impact on Iceland's competitiveness and marginalise people who work in jobs where their education is of less use, thereby limiting the opportunities they enjoy.

Similarly, it is important that persons with limited formal education have the opportunity to have their work experience assessed and to test their skills if they, intend to start studying and acquire further qualifications in Iceland. A variety of options are used for validation of competence, where previous work experience, knowledge and participation in social activities are evaluated for further study or professional development. Validation of competence is an important part of supporting immigrants in establishing themselves in a new society and continuing to develop their opportunities in a world of rapid technological development and changes in the labour market. Such opportunities must be available to both immigrants and native-born to support the successful development of both society and the labour market.

*3.3.10. Target 2.4 - Active research in the field of immigration and dissemination of research results*

Rapid societal changes, such as a large increase in immigration, are accompanied by various challenges for the group in question as well as for society as a whole. As pointed out in the status assessment of the Green Paper on Matters of Immigrants and Refugees, it is necessary to strengthen research in matters of immigrants and refugees and improve recording and gathering of data to facilitate long-term improvements in the quality of services founded on a knowledge base and measurable targets. Support for research, data gathering and targeted measurement of results can improve projects and decisions for the future. Dissemination of research has been insufficient, limiting the ability of those who work on matters of immigrants on a daily basis to be able to take advantage of domestic research results. Therefore, it is clear that a bridge needs to be built between researchers and workers in the field, and the third indicator of this target is significant in this regard. It is also clear that the indicators of the funding for research need to be developed better, since the funds currently dedicated to matters of immigrants support both projects and research.

If there is no change in both the number of studies and the dissemination of results, there is a risk that progress in the field will be slower and that decision-making will not be based on as solid a foundation as if research were available.

*3.3.11 Target 2.5 - The Icelandic education system meets the academic and social needs of children and youth with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all school levels*

The Icelandic school system needs to meet the academic and social needs of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds better. This is clearly stated in the Education Policy 2030. Children with a diverse linguistic and cultural background fare worse in the Icelandic school system than their native-born peers, and the difference tends to increase with the increasing age of the students. Young people in this group are more likely to drop out of secondary school than their native-born peers. The Icelandic government has already set itself the goal of expanding the publication of study materials, equalising the situation of children and young people with different backgrounds regardless of where they live, and emphasising their well-being and Icelandic skills at compulsory, secondary and university levels. This is done to equalise the situation of children and young people regardless of origin and give them equal opportunities to study at all school levels. Access to education is also the key to their welfare and opportunities for the future.

Failure to act to equalise opportunities in this respect increases the risk of growing class divisions between people of different origins and the marginalisation of young immigrants, directly counteracting the aims of this policy.

*3.3.12 Target 2.6 - The position of immigrants on the housing market is comparable to that of others*

The need for housing increases with the increase in population; however, in recent years the increase in residential housing has not kept up with the increase in population. Secure housing is a basic human need and is of major significance if people are to establish themselves in a new society and deal with the challenges that migration between countries entails. A higher proportion of immigrants are on the rental market than native-born, which can be normal enough at the beginning of their residence. Comparisons with other Nordic countries and OECD countries can also be used. Immigrants are also more likely to be unaware of their right to housing benefits and more likely to live in housing which is not designed for



residential use, and therefore does not confer entitlement to housing benefits. The situation of immigrants on the housing market is therefore a measure of their potential to gain a foothold in the country, in addition to which conditions on the housing market affect people's welfare. The indicators can be used to monitor whether the situation of immigrants on the housing market improves from its current situation, as is discussed in Section 3.3.2 of the Green Paper on Matters of Immigrants and Refugees. Monitoring arrears in connection with housing can reveal whether housing costs are more burdensome for immigrants than for native-born. Housing issues and the supply, both of rental housing and residential housing for purchase, are of concern to all residents. Here, however, there is a risk that in a difficult situation on the housing market, immigrants are at a greater disadvantage compared to other residents. One step towards a solution is to ensure better that immigrants are aware of their rights regarding benefits that need to be applied for, such as housing benefits.

Housing security is key to an inclusive society, and inequality on the housing market therefore has a negative impact on both people's financial and social welfare.

### *3.3.2013. Target 3.1 - The supply of practical instruction in Icelandic is good and reaches all areas of the country*

Immigrants themselves say that access to Icelandic instruction is one of their main challenges. The general consensus is that a much more powerful and diverse learning environment needs to be created, extending throughout the country, and the targets for supply and utilisation are intended to achieve this. It is in everyone's interest to provide opportunities to learn Icelandic and Icelandic sign language, as the language is the route to communication in Icelandic society. It is clear that in order to achieve this target, the supply and variety must be increased. Otherwise, immigrants are likely to have limited opportunities to learn and use the language. This would have a wide-reaching effect on communication and the equalisation of opportunities in the society, and it is likely that this will lead to the yet more use of English as the language of communication. With regard to Icelandic instruction in the workplace, the employers' views are of major significance and follow-up on the target will require their co-operation.

### *3.3.14. Target 3.2 - The quality of Icelandic instruction is ensured.*

With the aim of ensuring the quality of Icelandic instruction, criteria are set for the development of this rapidly growing teaching field. This does not imply that instruction today does not meet such criteria, but a framework for comparison is lacking and it is therefore difficult to get an overall view of quality issues regarding the situation in teaching of Icelandic as a second language. To achieve this, it is necessary to continue and possibly speed up the implementation of the instruction and proficiency criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and to strengthen opportunities for special training for teachers of Icelandic as a second language. However, the quality of the instruction will never be greater than the experience of those who take advantage of it, which makes it important to hear the users' voices regularly in order to create opportunities for further development of Icelandic teaching for immigrants. Using such criteria can also ensure responsible use of public money that is spent to support this instruction. Without criteria, it is not possible to guarantee this, nor to ensure equality between students who attend courses from different instruction providers.

*3.3.15 Target 3.3 - There is understanding and an incentive to use Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born*

This target is set to meet the voices of immigrants who believe that there is a general lack of understanding among Icelandic-speakers concerning opportunities for people to express themselves in Icelandic while learning the language. Similarly, there are voices maintaining that immigrants do not use Icelandic, and proposing various reasons for this. To understand the challenge which communication involves, it is necessary to know the attitudes of both native speakers and immigrants who use Icelandic as an interlanguage regarding opportunities to use Icelandic and the experiences this involves. The indicator is therefore intended to lay the foundation for a new perspective on the use of all kinds of Icelandic and people's experiences in this regard. Failure to encourage understanding and the motivation between native speakers and people who use an Icelandic interlanguage creates a risk that communication between immigrants and native-born will take place for the most part in English, which can be expected to be a third language in communication in many instances.

*3.3.16. Target 3.4 - Instruction in Icelandic is accessible and flexible*

This target is intended to meet more specifically the need for the supply of instruction and ensure that the educational opportunities are both available and accessible. Target 3.4 is linked to Target 3.1 which concerns supply measured by the number of courses. In this case, the emphasis is on time, such as the time of day, so that people in different jobs with different working hours, e.g. due to shift work or the nature of their work, have an opportunity to attend a course in Icelandic. And to make sure that location alone does not prevent learning Icelandic; as Iceland is a sparsely populated and large country, distance learning is in some cases the only possible solution and, in addition, suitable for many people, e.g. those with children and shift workers. Smart solutions are used as an important support tool for language learning and development of smart solutions in Iceland is rapid. Access to such solutions is key to enabling many people to take advantage of them, and therefore the focus here is on those smart solutions that are accessible to the general public. This target creates an important link between supply and quality, on the one hand, and accessibility, on the other. If accessibility is not improved, there is a risk that Icelandic instruction will reach far fewer immigrants and that the difference in accessibility between rural areas and the southwest corner of the country will remain unchanged from its current level.

*3.3.17. Target 3.5 - The evaluation system for Icelandic language skills is harmonised*

The target of widespread use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a benchmark for the assessment of proficiency is set to create transparency and standardised criteria. The advantage of this indicator is that it enables a comparison of skills in different languages and facilitates both the setting of criteria for language skills and clarity as to which level of proficiency is desired when language ability is required. Use of the Common European Framework makes it easier for persons who are learning Icelandic to know what requirements are made of their proficiency, for example, when applying for studies or jobs. The use of such a measuring device is therefore encouraging and increases predictability as to the requirements when it comes to study and proficiency in Icelandic as a second language on the labour market.

#### 4. National Action Plan for the next four years

Actions in the National Action Plan are intended to lead to changes in the indicators on which the policy is based. The Immigrant Council, appointed by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour as provided for in Art. 4 of the Immigrant Affairs Act, No. 116/2013, worked on the creation of actions based on the objectives that had previously been laid out in the draft policy of the White Paper. The first meeting on actions took place in April 2024 and the Council's review, which included a total of 11 meetings to formulate actions, was completed in August. All of the actions were carried out in consultation with the line ministries and institutions responsible for their implementation. The National Action Plan enters into effect on 1 January 2025 and replaces the current plan, Parliamentary Resolution No. 29/152, on a National Action Plan on Matters of Immigrants for 2022-2025, which was approved by Althingi on 16 June 2022.

The National Action Plan is prepared for a four-year period, cf. the provision of the above-mentioned Immigrant Affairs Act. Therefore, it is foreseen that in addition to this first plan, three additional National Action Plans will need to be compiled during the policy period. The actions take into account that this is the beginning of a 15-year journey, that it will clearly take time to implement various improvement opportunities, and that the need to respond to changes in the society will continue.

There are 26 actions laid out in the National Action Plan, each referenced to targets of the policy and aimed at achieving its targets. The National Action Plan does not include an action for Target 1.6, on the visibility of the society's diversity in the public media. The reason for this is that the target and actions intended to achieve this target are set forth in RÚV's current policy, which states, among other things, that RÚV should reflect the diversity of society in its programming and all activities. This includes the obligation to analyse the needs of various groups and to increase consultation with stakeholders in order to serve a diverse society. Particular consideration is given to aspects related to gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and origin, in accordance with the policy of the European Broadcasting Union on focusing on diversity. Nor is any action set out in connection with Target 3.5, on harmonising the evaluation system for Icelandic language skills, as Action 4 in the Parliamentary Resolution on an Action Plan for the Icelandic Language for 2024-2026 addresses this target.

##### *4.1. Target 1.1- Immigrants are active participants in democratic elections in Iceland and their participation is comparable to that of the society as a whole*

###### *Action 1.1.1 Democratic participation and democratic education*

Action 1.1.1 is intended to encourage immigrants to participate in democratic elections and provide education on democratic organisation and governance in Iceland. Election arrangements and electoral systems vary between countries, and it is necessary for immigrants to receive information about their rights in Iceland. The right to vote and stand for election varies depending upon whether the elections are local authority elections, elections to the Althingi, presidential elections or referendums. Analyses of voter turnout have shown that there is a considerable difference between the participation of immigrants and native-born in all elections. One of the routes available to achieve a one-quarter increase in voter participation among immigrants is to specifically instruct people on their right to participate and about the general arrangement of elections in Iceland, as it has been revealed in the process of drafting the policy that immigrants lack information about their right to vote.

Point a) of the action provides for Registers Iceland to direct efforts to establish a system enabling the dispatch of electronic information, basic information, to those immigrants who have acquired the right to vote since the last election, i.e. are new on the electoral rolls. The intention is for such information to be sent via the island.is web portal. The future system will ensure that immigrants who become eligible to vote and stand for election are automatically sent information about their acquired right and educational materials about the arrangements for the various elections in Iceland and how to exercise their right to vote. The analysis of the solution and its implementation are expected to be complete in 2028 and the costs of the action should be covered by the general appropriations of Registers Iceland.

Point b) provides for education for children and young people on democratic elections, their nature and organisation. Children and youth from the group of immigrants should know about the right to participate in elections, understand the structure of democracy and its implementation in Iceland. This education will be part of the instruction of children in compulsory schools and will be an ongoing project carried out within the framework of traditional schoolwork.

Democracy and human rights are a basic element in the National Curriculum Guides for compulsory schools and secondary schools. It is important that this basic element in education reach all students, and that children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are excluded. The development project Education, Reception, Culture (MEMM), which concerns services for children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see Target 2.5), is intended, among other things, to develop, and make sure the school community has, powerful study materials, tools and advice. The emphases of MEMM will contribute to this action.

#### *4.2. Target 1.2- Immigrants have opportunities equal to those of others for social participation*

As social participation has different manifestations and covers a wide area, it is clear that the actions under Target 1.2 will never be exhaustive. The focal points of this National Action Plan are directed at: activity and opportunities on the labour market; opportunities for children and young people in sports, youth and other leisure activities; and further knowledge acquisition about the well-being and social participation of immigrants.

##### *Action 1.2.1. Activity and opportunities on the labour market*

The Directorate of Labour plays a key role, both when it comes to providing services to people outside the labour market and also in general regarding various services to immigrants in this country. Communication and co-operation between persons on the labour market are among the cornerstones of an inclusive society, as immigrants make up about a quarter of employed persons in Iceland. The increase in immigrants as a percentage of the employed in Iceland has been among the greatest in any OECD country in the last decade. In order to maintain the high employment participation of immigrants in Iceland and increase equality on the labour market, the Directorate of Labour will work specifically on three aspects concerning immigrants on the labour market under Action 1.2.1, which aims at sustainable employment and combating repeated unemployment.

In point a) of the action, people who live with language barriers or have little work experience are to be offered support from the Directorate of Labour in forming lasting connections with business and industry and creating opportunities to take advantage of the possibilities of work participation in general and for work suited to their individual knowledge and education.

Point b) provides for establishing education about rights, obligations and workplace culture on the Icelandic labour market. Many parties, such as various trade unions and interest groups, have made a major contribution the instructing their members about rights on the labour market and material used to this end is available in many languages. It is important to involve additional parties in this kind of education and that it be accessible to both persons outside the labour market and within it. People who move to Iceland cannot automatically be assumed to know their rights, as the labour market of each country has its own characteristics, different laws and regulations. An examination of studies that have been conducted on the status of immigrants on the labour market indicates that immigrants are likely to be more vulnerable than other groups to various types of illegal exploitation. Empowering immigrants themselves and educating them about rights, obligations and workplace culture is conducive to improving their situation. The Directorate of Labour is expected to adapt the instruction and its emphases as needed at any given time.

Education and vocational training represent considerable wealth, in both economic and social terms. Point c) of the action provides for the Directorate of Labour to direct co-operation with business and industry and education to enterprises about the benefits of assessing immigrants' education, the characteristics and advantages of a multicultural work environment and opportunities for increasing the mobility of immigrants on the labour market. It is in everyone's interest to improve the language skills and network of immigrants on the Icelandic labour market and, in so doing, increase both the economic benefits, well-being and prosperity of immigrants, as well as the competitiveness of businesses.

*Action 1.2.2 Participation of children and young people in sports, youth and other leisure activities*

Surveys regularly show that the participation of immigrants in sports and leisure activities is significantly lower than the participation of other children and youth. Non-formal education is a valuable and important tool for inclusion. The intention is to build on projects that have given good results, in co-operation with local authorities, sports and leisure clubs, school communities, children and their parents.

*Action 1.2.3 Research on the well-being and social participation of immigrants*

Until now, there has not been a comprehensive study of the well-being and social participation of immigrants in Iceland. More limited studies have been carried out, for instance, of their participation in and situation on the labour market. Such studies have been carried out in other areas, for instance, concerning senior citizens, and recently a comparative study was conducted on the situation of older immigrants compared to older native-born. More knowledge needs to be obtained of immigrants' own assessment of their well-being, opportunities and obstacles to social participation, so that action can be taken where necessary. Such research lays the foundation for further actions to achieve the goals of the policy. Work on such a study is expected to begin in 2026 using a mixture of traditional questionnaires and conversation with focus groups. Such a study will also underline the basic values of an inclusive society, where native-born and immigrants are equally involved in formulating solutions for the future, responding to real needs and removing obstacles in order to equalise social participation of different groups.

*4.3. Target 1.3 - Attitudes towards immigrants are positive, as is understanding among the general public of the terms multiculturalism and inclusion*

*Action 1.3.1. The opinion survey “Attitudes of the General Public on Matters of Immigrants” will be carried out regularly*

Since 2017, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has had a study carried out of the public's attitude to matters of immigrants, and this action is aimed at continuing regular measurements based on the existing questionnaire. Furthermore, the intention is to scrutinise those elements that can be explored better and add to the questions and topics that are explored, while at the same time maintaining the continuity of the previous topics studied in order to monitor and respond to the development of the public's attitude to matters of immigrants in Iceland. The measurement of attitudes will serve as the foundation for targeted actions to increase understanding of matters of immigrants which are designed to counter negative attitudes. Surveying attitudes every two years enables better assessment of which actions are necessary to implement the 15-year policy.

*Action 1.3.2. Strengthen the educational role of the Multicultural Department of the Directorate of Labour*

As a relatively young society in terms of matters of immigrants, it is natural that educational materials need to be made available in Iceland on aspects that can create unnecessary obstacles for immigrants in society. It applies equally to education for the existing members of society and for people who move to the country. The Directorate of Labour is already by law responsible for providing advice and information to the government, institutions, enterprises, organisations and individuals in connection with matters of immigrants. In addition, the Directorate of Labour is to advise local authorities in receiving immigrants who move to the municipality and to compile and share information about the rights and obligations of immigrants. Since the institution and its predecessor, the Multicultural Information Centre, were entrusted with this role, there have been major changes in the number of immigrants in Iceland. For this reason alone, the need is seen to strengthen its educational role from what it is now. The action is three-part, focusing on increasing education in various fields, aimed at different target groups. It is to offer instruction and access to educational materials on multicultural sensitivity, the status of immigrants in Iceland, the social benefits of equal status for residents regardless of origin and the characteristics of an inclusive society and the strength of diversity in the workplace.

Point a) concerns increasing direct provision of educational materials for workplaces and community education, while under point b) the focus will be on educational materials which enterprises and institutions themselves, e.g. their management and heads of human resources, can make use of in their own workplace efforts if they so choose.

Point c) of the action specifically proposes to have the community education material in *Landneminn* made available and effectively presented to all immigrants. *Landneminn*, which is already available in seven languages, is not sufficiently well known among the immigrants who live in Iceland. A circuit of the country by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, in preparation of the policy and National Action Plan, and conversations with almost 500 immigrants throughout Iceland revealed that the overwhelming majority of the immigrants spoken with were not familiar with *Landneminn's* educational material and therefore did not have the opportunity to utilise the information found there. Point c) of the action is therefore mainly concerned with increasing the visibility and making better use of education and

information that has already been invested in but can be utilised better for a larger target group of immigrants.

#### *4.4. Target 1.4- Poverty among immigrants is not greater than in the society in general*

##### *Action 1.4.1. 1.4.1. Social factors that counteract poverty and the marginalisation of immigrants*

According to the Prime Minister's report *Poverty and Estimated Social Costs*, which was published in 2023, immigrants, together with single parents, are more likely than other social groups to be below the low-income limit for an extended period (longer than three years). This situation exists despite the fact that the general employment rate of immigrants is higher than that of native-born and is the highest in the Nordic countries. In 2020, just over 13,600 immigrants had an income below the low-income limit, which corresponds to almost a quarter of all immigrants in the country. It is therefore clear that the current high rate of poverty among immigrants can have a long-term effect on their situation in Iceland. The effects of long-term poverty should be given special attention, as the above-mentioned report points out that immigrants experience frequent, serious and often long-term poverty, which must be a cause for concern. The demographic composition of immigrants also differs from that of native-born, as the former are generally younger. If young people find themselves trapped in poverty, the likelihood that their children will be poor increases, as the fact is that children of immigrants live in a more vulnerable financial situation than other children. About one-third of the children of immigrants in Iceland live in poverty. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely than other children to end up poor themselves as adults.

In order to enable the government to respond, the specific factors that result in poverty among immigrants must be examined; point a) proposes to map those factors specifically. Point b) also proposes that poverty among immigrants compared to native-born be assessed specifically through the Survey of Income and Living Standards (EU-SILC) of Statistics Iceland. This issue is also related to Action 2.4.2, on improved access to statistics on immigrants in Iceland.

#### *4.5. Target 1.5 – Immigrants are employed by both the state and local authorities*

##### *Action 1.5.1 Public jobs accessible to all*

The National Action Plan in Matters of Immigrants 2022-2025 included an action aimed at increasing the number of immigrants in public jobs and positions of influence, both by revising the state's recruitment manual and a course in multicultural management, cultural literacy and cultural sensitivity for human resource managers, equality representatives and others who exercise hiring authority on behalf of the government. During the validity period of the plan, the state's Personnel Policy Department has worked on analysing this situation and as it turned out, it was not easy to obtain basic information on immigrants working in the public sector. The OECD's review and analysis of the immigration situation in Iceland also revealed that the Directorate of Equality has received very few complaints concerning hirings involving discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic origin or religion/beliefs. In the opinion of the OECD, this is not due to the fact that such discrimination is less prevalent in Iceland than in other countries, but rather that the complaint pathway is not clear and that recruitment processes do not clarify what is being sought in hiring. Action on opening access to public jobs for all is based on these factors.

Point a) provides for work on the analysis and effective recording of the diversity of human resources, based on immigration status and job sector/profession. This will make it possible to examine whether opportunities to work for public bodies reflect the increase in the number of immigrants and their growing proportion on the labour market. The aim is to begin such an examination with the state and then to examine, together with the National Association of Local Authorities, whether the same methodology can be applied in analyses concerning employees of local authorities.

Point b) provides for a specific examination of hiring processes and whether it is necessary to make improvements. In that context, it has been mentioned that many immigrants experience that their names mean that they do not have the same chance of getting interviews for jobs despite their extensive education, and that it is not clear what constitutes basic requirements, such as what the definition of good skills in Icelandic is. The latter point is specifically addressed in point c) where, in connection with the implementation of the general use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, it is proposed that language skills refer to the skill levels of the Framework, so that requirements are clear and applicants, regardless of origin, have an easier time understanding the requirements for language skills. It is worth noting that the City of Reykjavík has already started implementing such a procedure on a trial basis, and it is important to be able to build on that experience for the future.

The synergies resulting from all three parts of the action will make it possible to work more clearly to ensure that public workplaces are among those workplaces where diversity prevails, the work environment is inclusive and the strengths of diversity in society are utilised.

#### *4.6. Target 2.1 - Effective and diverse information services for immigrants*

##### *Action 2.1.1. Building diverse and effective information services for immigrants*

One action, divided into four parts, is presented under the target of building effective and diverse information services for immigrants. When they take up residence in Iceland, it is important for immigrants to be able to obtain information about their rights and obligations simply and effectively. Various public bodies offer such information in foreign languages. In addition, a special counselling office for immigrants, New in Iceland, was established in 2021. Originally an independent project under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, it subsequently was moved under the Multicultural Information Centre and is now under the auspices of the Directorate of Labour. Despite these projects, information on rights and obligations does not seem to reach the majority of the target group. Immigrants repeatedly mention how complicated and time-consuming it is to obtain the necessary information. Many are therefore too dependent on information, either from fellow countrymen or employers, which can in some cases increase the likelihood of misinterpretation of information or that important information is not received. This can affect the person's legal status in Iceland, for example, regarding the economic and social rights related to registration of legal domicile. It is also important to bear in mind that information dissemination in Icelandic society relies heavily on written information and electronic information systems. This makes it very difficult for illiterate immigrants to obtain information. The same applies to those groups that are not very computer literate.

Point a) assumes that the information that is already available on island.is is used and that a special life event section will be established, as website shortcuts are called which are intended to collect practical information about certain issues, such as having a child,



commencing study or growing elderly. Moving to Iceland will be one such life event. The website [island.is](http://island.is) is accessible in Icelandic and English. The intention is also to examine the possibility of linking this to the website of the Directorate of Labour, [mcc.is](http://mcc.is), which has a large amount of practical information in a number of languages.

Point b) looks at routes other than exclusively digital ones for the dissemination of information and at the same ensuring access to information throughout the country. The information services that have been available until now have not been sufficiently distributed around the country; however, the strong network of service offices of the Directorate of Labour offers an opportunity to bring services closer to those who need them.

Point c) examines a revision of the *Landneminn* study materials following suggestions from immigrants throughout Iceland on how additional information can be added, especially practical information on various issues related to the challenges of settling in a new country. Community education materials always need revision, as our society is undergoing rapid changes. Special consideration will be given to the creation of videos to facilitate access to information. Related to this, point d) of the action provides for targeted promotion and marketing of the information services in a) and b), to increase the likelihood that immigrants will be familiar with the services. By doing so, it will be possible to reach increased numbers and make the best use of the system that has been created for the dissemination of information to persons who have immigrated to Iceland.

#### 4.7. - Target 2.2– Strong and early support for refugees

Six actions are proposed under Target 2.2, all of which are intended to support refugees at the beginning of their residence, after being granted protection in Iceland. The following section gives a detailed explanation of each action.

##### Action 2.2.1. Strong and early support for refugees

Never before have more people been displaced due to war and persecution in the world, and effects of the altered global situation are clearly visible in matters of refugees here in Iceland. The number of refugees has increased in this country in recent years, making it urgent to strengthen early support for people who receive a residence permit here and to ensure refugees with services from the time protection is granted with the aim of empowering them and supporting them to take root in a new society. This service consists mainly of additional support during their first three years of stay in Iceland.

Under point a), the intention is to continue developing the support that has been provided to refugees in recent years under special agreements between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and individual local authorities on so-called co-ordinated reception of refugees. Further work is needed to define that support and ensure the access of refugees, throughout the country, to such support. This consists of both support overseen by the social services of the local authorities as well as services provided by the Directorate of Labour.

It has been pointed out that the voice of immigrants in Icelandic society is not generally strong, although this is not always the case. Most commonly decisions on specific issues relating to services for immigrants and refugees are made without the involvement of those at whom the service is directed. Meetings with refugees organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Akureyri, Bifröst, Selfoss, Reykjanesbær and Reykjavík in the run-up to the drafting of the policy and National Action Plan support that conclusion. The services that have been developed and are discussed in point a) of the action are based on a Norwegian model and adapted by professionals who work with refugees in Iceland. By analysing the need

and nature of necessary services for refugees on the basis of design thinking, where the paths through and needs of the user in the system are mapped and developed in consultation with users, a more targeted and effective system can be achieved for the future. This is the aim of point b) of the action.

Point c) is aimed at utilising the human resources inherent in the refugees themselves by establishing peer support for refugees. The challenges of rebuilding one's life after fleeing one's homeland are best known to those who have experienced them. The use of peer support is a well-known and useful methodology in strengthening and empowering people.

Point d) proposes to provide specific support for the training of staff who work with refugees in multicultural sensitivity and a trauma-informed approach in services. Trauma increases people's risk of developing PTSD, depression and anxiety. It is important that staff who work with refugees have good knowledge of a trauma-informed approach in their work, so that the support that refugees receive to put down roots in a new society is used in the best possible way.

Point e) of the action is specifically intended to look at social support and how it can strengthen the connections of refugees with society and increase opportunities and possibilities for activity. The action is also related to the previous parts of this action, as they work together and are intended to promote more streamlined, efficient and powerful services for refugees based on users' assessment of their own needs.

#### *Action 2.2.2. Support for the mental health of refugees through psychological support*

The intention is to apply recognised methods of screening for psychological symptoms to assess a person's need for an appropriate remedy. The action, therefore, requires the training of staff, for instance, in reception facilities, and others who work with refugees, and is therefore directly related to point d) of action 2.2.1. Under this action, the focus will be on adult refugees, while support for children will fall under the implementation of the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity. Until now, trauma support for refugees has mainly been carried out on an individual basis and it has proven difficult to meet the need for assistance. By relying more on a group approach, the aim is to reach more people, but also take advantage of possibilities for peer support and opportunities to deal with challenges caused by trauma with the support of additional parties. Providing all refugees with access to psychological support, as is anticipated in point a) of the action, will help identify those who need specialised help, such as evidence-based, trauma-informed psychotherapy. Point b) of the action is directly related to the targets of point a) and aims to ensure safe referrals and synergies. These actions will result in having challenges, that can be addressed with psychological support, becoming less likely to be referred to more specialised services within the mental health system.

#### *Action 2.2.3. Ready access by refugees to evidence-based treatment for PTSD*

This is an action which falls within the mental health system and applies to adults. The mental health issues of refugee children are expected to be handled by specialised services for children and based on the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity. The action, which is in three parts, aims to further expand a system of evidence-based treatment for PTSD and the use of such treatment for refugees. Treatment in point a) and training in point b) will be in the hands of mental healthcare staff with specialised education and experience in that field, and point c) is aimed at making clear provision for people to get appropriate treatment. The action is also based on the screening proposed in

point a) of Action 2.2.2 and is intended to better meet the needs of refugees for mental healthcare services and to ensure that psychiatrists only deal with the most complex cases where specialised help is demonstrably needed.

#### *Action 2.2.4. Reception of and support for unaccompanied children*

Unaccompanied children are children who come to the country without parents or guardians. Since 2022, the number of unaccompanied children coming to Iceland in search of international protection has increased significantly. The large increase is in line with the general increase in the number of applicants for international protection in Iceland.

The issues of unaccompanied children are more often than not complicated and the children are usually in need of extensive services and support for them to establish themselves in a new society. Unaccompanied children are considered to be in a particularly vulnerable position, as they are, among other things, exposed to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation if their safety is not guaranteed. Cases of unaccompanied children are automatically child protection cases and fall under the Child Protection Act, No. 2002/80. The costs of services for the children are reimbursed to local authorities under Art. 15 of the Act.

Much has been done recently to increase predictability in services to this group. Special residential facilities have been established for older unaccompanied children, where foster care is less appropriate. Co-operation between child protection services has been increased and work is being done on a co-ordinated procedure under the leadership of the National Agency for Children and Families. It is important to continue what has been done well and complete projects that are in progress.

The pressure on individual child protection committees and local child protection services has been very high with the increase in the number of children, and the cost of managing the system has increased in line with it. At the beginning of 2024, the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs and the town Suðurnesjabær concluded an agreement on a one-year trial project to improve support for unaccompanied children. An assessment of the experience of this project has yet to be made and a decision made on a possible continuation. However, it is clear that continuing support for this most vulnerable group of refugee children will be needed, and this will be done in cooperation with local authorities that provide the service.

#### *Action 2.2.5. Support for local authorities for the reception of refugee children*

For the first time in the school year 2022-2023 local authorities were enabled to apply for special financial support from the state for children aged 0-18 who had received international protection or a residence permit for humanitarian reasons. The project was linked to agreements with the local authorities on the reception of refugees, but it was decided not to limit the support to local authorities that had signed such an agreement; instead, it was possible to apply for support for all children in the country who had held such a status from 1 January 2021. The main focuses of support were:

- financial support for additional support in school or childcare services;
- support for the development of resources for children who have a history of intermittent schooling;
- a special allocation through the Educational Material Development Fund to create study materials for the group;

- a full-time equivalent position at the National Agency for Children and Families for advising local authorities on child protection matters.

The project was extended in a slightly modified form for the school year 2023-2024 and it is assumed that projects of this nature will be developed further and will be available while additional services are needed for this vulnerable group.

#### *Action 2.2.6. Icelandic instruction and community education for refugees*

In recent years, work has been directed at developing education for refugees similar to what is done in the other Nordic countries. This action is intended to provide a better framework for such education and is structured in three parts. Icelandic instruction and community education are intended to support people in gaining a basic command of Icelandic and an understanding of Icelandic society and social structure.

Under point a) of the action, intensive Icelandic language instruction is to be assured at the beginning of the residence permit, which must be tailored to the different educational needs of refugees. Up until now, Icelandic instruction for refugees has been very limited and, on average, adult refugees have been able to take two Icelandic courses, which correspond to 80 hours of instruction, run by the Directorate of Labour. It is obvious that no one achieves proficiency in a language with such limited instruction, and significant improvement is needed here to reach the standards of Nordic countries. The Nordic country closest to Iceland in terms of instruction in the country's language is Finland, and there refugees are guaranteed 2,100 hours of instruction in Finnish. Denmark and Norway come next, while Sweden provides unlimited access to Swedish lessons for refugees. Iceland is therefore only beginning its journey towards the standards of neighbouring countries, although clearly learning Icelandic lays the foundation for the possibility of active participation in Icelandic society.

In point b), it is assumed that the community education in *Landneminn* will be part of the instruction offered and will be accessible to all refugees; a revision of *Landneminn* is discussed in Action 2.1.1, and will be based on suggestions from immigrants and refugees themselves as to what type of materials and instruction is of most use to them when beginning their residence in Iceland. In order to give people optimal opportunity to take advantage of the instruction and education provided for in points a) and b) of the action, point c) provides for the mapping out of the diverse learning needs of refugees in Icelandic and community education. In the services provided to refugees, it is the counsellors of social services and the Directorate of Labour who will support people in attending the reception instruction, and therefore it is necessary to make available an assessment tool that these workers can use to direct refugees into appropriate study groups. As refugees are not a homogeneous group, when considering the diversity involved in reception education it is important to look at what factors determine their different educational needs, such as previous education, literacy, knowledge of the writing system or whether the person has a disability or impairment.

#### *4.8. Target 2.3 - Studies from foreign institutions are assessed for job qualifications in Iceland, and validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants*

The target concerns adults, value creation and utilisation of human resources on the labour market. There are two actions under this target, directed at the different needs of the immigrants themselves and those of the labour market.

*Action 2.3.1: Study at institutions abroad is evaluated for professional qualifications in Iceland*

Education is an investment for society as a whole as well as for the individual student. As the situation currently stands, a large number of immigrants in Iceland have educational qualifications which are not properly recognised in the Icelandic labour market. This involves a loss for the individual as well as for society. It is important to ensure to the best possible extent that the education and skills that immigrants have acquired is recognised and utilised as merited in the Icelandic labour market, and that professional qualifications are granted for legally protected professions. Recently, a single portal was established where requests for evaluation of qualifications can be submitted, a first step in the development of efficient evaluation of foreign studies. Evaluation of education is a challenge in many countries, but in the Nordic region, Sweden has progressed the furthest in developing an efficient system for this purpose. An examination will be made of models in other countries and how they can be implemented in Iceland.

Point a) provides for the further development of the education assessment portal to make it user-friendly and efficient. Persons whose education is not assessed as appropriate for professional qualifications in Iceland will receive information and instructions as to what additional education is needed to acquire professional qualifications and the routes to obtain this in Iceland. The intention is to equalise the position of individuals on the labour market, regardless of origin.

Point b) is aimed at establishing co-operation with the social partners to increase the probability that the education which has been assessed will be directly utilised on the labour market. It is also necessary to strengthen co-operation between professions in evaluating foreign education in order to increase the efficiency of evaluation and for better utilisation of human resources and education on the labour market. This co-operation will support the work under point a), as utilisation of expertise is a common interest of the state, the social partners and society as a whole.

*Action 2.3.2. Validation of competence is used to assess the skills and experience of immigrants with limited formal education*

Validation of competence is an important part of assessing and confirming individuals' skills. Emphasising that the skills that immigrants have acquired through employment will be assessed and utilised on their merits on the Icelandic labour market and in the education system can increase value creation and welfare for the society. Validation of competence is an important part of encouraging the development of skills and often lays the foundation for further study and development on the labour market. The percentage of immigrants among those taking advantage of validation of competence has risen in recent years, but there are clearly opportunities for further progress in consideration of the percentage of immigrants of those who are active on the labour market. One step in further strengthening validation of competence is to map out the procedure and make immigrants more aware of validation of competence. Immigrants' increased knowledge of the possibilities offered by validation of competence should mean that workers will perform jobs more suitable to their skills and have opportunities for further education and specialisation, while employers will benefit more from the experience of immigrants. The action will be carried out in close consultation between the Ministry and stakeholders.

#### 4.9. Target 2.4 - Active research in the field of immigration and dissemination of research results

Two actions are presented under this target.

##### *Action 2.4.1 Research, data gathering and knowledge sharing*

Although the number of immigrants is growing rapidly in Iceland, there are relatively few studies that focus specifically on matters of immigrants and an inclusive society. Immigration as an academic discipline is still new in Iceland and specific support is necessary to encourage it. Many studies are in their early stages and few large and long-term studies have been conducted. Experts working on matters of immigrants point out that dissemination of research has been lacking, making it difficult for them to make use of the results of those studies which have actually been carried out. It is necessary to build a bridge between research, its utilisation and development in the field.

As one step towards boosting academic efforts in the areas concerning matters of immigrants, point a) of the action proposes to establish a knowledge forum, with the task of keeping track of research and applied projects in matters of immigrants, disseminating the results of research/projects and analysing in what areas further knowledge and research is needed, in line with the government's policy.

The intention in point b) of the action is to analyse where it is necessary to improve the collection, co-ordination and registration of data, such as statistical data to facilitate research, comparison of research and analysis of different issues concerning immigrants in Iceland. The action is partially related to Action 2.4.2. although the nature of the data in question is different. The analysis will be in the hands of the knowledge forum, cf. point a).

As one aspect of immediately beginning dissemination of the knowledge that is being accumulated in matters of immigrants, point c) anticipates that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour will arrange a conference for professionals on the development of matters of immigrants twice during the validity period of the Action Plan, in 2025 and 2027. The Ministry, in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers, hosted such an event in Reykjavík in 2023, which was a great success. This creates an opportunity to effectively present the results of research and development projects funded by the Development Fund for Immigrant Issues, as well as creating an important platform for a growing discipline. The three parts of the action work together to contribute to a stronger knowledge community in the field of immigration and a more targeted use of research results and project experience.

##### *Action 2.4.2 Improved access to statistics on immigrants in Iceland*

International organisations, such as the OECD, have pointed out shortcomings in access to statistics on immigrants in Iceland. It has been pointed out that various data necessary for the publication of such statistics are already available at the various institutions but are not published. A preliminary analysis indicates that the problem lies mostly in the data infrastructure of institutions, which hinders the exchange of data and thus the production and publication of statistics on immigrants. Iceland must also fulfil obligations arising from Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common framework for European statistics relating to persons and households based on data at individual level collected from samples, which has not been implemented in Iceland. Therefore, an action to improve access to statistics on immigrants represents the first step on the road to improved access to statistics on immigrants in this country. An overview of existing data on immigrants available at Statistics Iceland and other public institutions is already

available. On the basis of this overview, the intention is to define opportunities for improvement and present proposals for the necessary data structure and data sharing between institutions. Subsequently, a cost estimate will be drawn up for the dissemination of these statistics on immigration, where quality and consistency will be guaranteed. This should achieve the objective of enabling all social statistics to be analysed with reference to background variables on immigration status.

*4.10. Target 2.5 - The Icelandic education system meets the academic and social needs of children and youth with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds at all school levels*

To achieve Target 2.5, three actions are proposed that are intended to reach as many elements as possible in the education system, but with a clear prioritisation.

*Action 2.5.1 A harmonised procedure for the reception, education and inclusion of children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds nationwide*

The development project Education, Reception, Culture (MEMM) on services for children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a temporary development project which the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs, the Directorate of Education and School Services and the Department of Education and Youth of the City of Reykjavík have established and are working on in close co-operation during the school years 2024-2025 and 2025-2026. These parties will provide the funding, expertise, facilities and personnel and are thus responsible for the progress of the project according to a tripartite agreement on the project.

The aim of the project is to develop, and ensure the educational community is equipped with, effective advice, study materials and tools, as well as specific support for resolving complex situations. The implementation of the project is the responsibility of the new Directorate of Education and School Services with the support of the Ministry and in cooperation with the City of Reykjavík and others. Support, advice and materials related to the project will be made available throughout the country with a focus on district school offices, preschools, compulsory and secondary schools, and leisure activities where the children live and study.

Examples of support in more complex situations would be, for example, counselling in cases of unaccompanied children and other complex child protection cases, services for children with severe disabilities, etc.

A special co-ordination manager has been engaged by the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs to lead the project and provide the project with professional supervision, as well as leading a co-ordination team related to the project comprised of, in addition to the original members, representatives of local authorities, universities, professional associations and grassroots organisations.

The outcome of the MEMM development project is expected to serve as the basis for a uniform procedure for receiving, teaching and serving children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds throughout Iceland, on behalf of the state and local authorities, intersecting all school levels and systems of services.

*Action 2.5.2. Increasing publication of educational materials for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds*

At the 2024 autumn parliamentary session, the Minister of Education and Children will present a new bill of legislation on study materials. The bill proposes to provide free educational materials to children up to the age of 18 in preschool, compulsory school and secondary school. The operation of the Educational Materials Fund will be simplified and role of the Educational Materials Development Fund expanded to include providing grants for translation of study materials. The bill also proposes that the Minister be authorised to set quality standards for the creation and publication of study materials. In the Explanatory Notes of the anticipated bill, reference is made to Education Policy 2030, which was approved by Althingi in 2021. Nine main actions were presented there, one of which concerned high-quality educational and teaching materials for the entire education system. The aim of the action is to increase the quality, variety and accessibility of educational and teaching materials for students at preschool, compulsory school and secondary school levels, as well as for continuing education, with a focus on digital instruction materials in Icelandic, sign language and content for students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The new Directorate of Education and School Services places special emphasis on the publication of educational materials for students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Part of the development project Education, Reception, Culture (MEMM), which concerns services for children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see Target 2.5), is intended, among other things, to develop, and make sure the school community has, quality advice, educational materials and tools and there will be synergies with the MEMM project and publication of educational materials by MMS.

*Action 2.5.3. Development and expansion of the secondary educational options for children and young people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds*

A revision of the National Curriculum Guide for Secondary Schools is in preparation in the Ministry of Education and Children's Affairs. Particular attention will be paid to what changes need to be made with regard to this group of students.

Starting in the autumn of 2024, funding has been provided for three new Icelandic programmes at the Secondary School in Mosfellsbær, the Reykjavík Women's Gymnasium (Kvennaskólann í Reykjavík) and the Ísafjörður Secondary School. This is done in response to the ever-increasing need for secondary school education for newly arrived students.

The development project Education, Reception, Culture (MEMM), which concerns services for children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see Target 2.5), is intended, among other things, to develop, and make sure the school community has, quality advice, study materials and tools. In connection with the development project, a special full-time equivalent position has been established, which is divided among a group of working experts in the secondary school system to support the secondary schools in this project.

*4.11. Target 3.1 - The supply of practical instruction in Icelandic is good and reaches all areas of the country*

*Action 3.1.1. Icelandic instruction is made diverse and effective for everyone*

This action concerns Icelandic instruction for adults, while the Icelandic instruction for children with a diverse linguistic and cultural background falls under the statutory role of



preschools, compulsory schools and secondary schools according to the National Curriculum Guide for each school level. In addition, Actions 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 deal with the instruction of this group.

When immigrants themselves are asked about their skills in the language of the country where they live, immigrants in Iceland rate their skills in Icelandic the lowest in the OECD. Only 18% of immigrants in Iceland believe they have sufficient skills in Icelandic, while the average for the OECD countries is 60%. It is clear that there is room for improvement when it comes to Icelandic instruction, and there is a need to further increase the diversity of studies that are effective, aimed at different learning needs and located in people's local environment. Both the immigrants themselves as well as the OECD point out that the costs borne by participants in language learning is high in Iceland, higher than in other Nordic countries, and often results in people not having the option of studying Icelandic. Quality language instruction encourages both labour market participation as well as other social participation, in addition to which parents' ability in Icelandic provides support for their children's studies and future possibilities.

Point a) of the action is aimed at ensuring the right of immigrants to Icelandic instruction, in part by strengthening the legal framework on matters of immigrants and by enabling people from different groups to study Icelandic, especially in their first years of living in the country. The action is also related to Action 18, on Icelandic for all, in the Parliamentary Resolution on an Action Plan for the Icelandic Language for 2024-2026, which is aimed at having as many people as possible achieve a certain basic proficiency in Icelandic while improving the entire framework of the service. Point b) of the action also follows up on the government's policy on increased opportunities for work-related Icelandic instruction and opportunities for learning Icelandic during working hours. Specific support is foreseen for collaboration with enterprises on Icelandic instruction during working hours, and for utilising various technological solutions and innovation to use and increase work-related vocabulary. The Directorate of Labour has, among other things, been involved in the preliminary development of courses where vocational training and Icelandic studies are combined, which has given good results and needs to be further strengthened. Other education providers, such as lifelong learning centres, have also integrated Icelandic into certified adult education programmes. In 2023 half of the participants in certified adult education programmes were immigrants.

An action on the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was included in the National Action Plan for Matters of Immigrants for 2022-2025, and point c) of the action is intended to continue to build on the basis of that action. Study materials and their development are an important part of expanding the teaching of Icelandic for immigrants, and open access will help to improve Icelandic instruction, which also falls under Action 3.2.1. The Educational Fund, which operates under the Adult Education Act, No. 27/2010, has for many years provided grants for innovation and development projects, including teaching and support materials for teaching Icelandic to adult immigrants.

Part d) of the action provides for co-operation with local authorities and education providers on an Icelandic language bridging program for adults with a focus on parents of compulsory school children. An Icelandic language bridging program means that Icelandic language instruction is brought into the local community, closer to the pupils, and the collaboration of the state, local authorities and education providers facilitates access to Icelandic instruction. Immigrant parents' knowledge of Icelandic supports their children's education and reinforces co-operation between homes and schools. Immigrants themselves, especially in non-urban areas, have pointed out the limited access to Icelandic instruction in

more sparsely populated areas. However, all settlements have compulsory schools, which can serve as a forum for Icelandic instruction for adults. Children's compulsory schooling also creates an opportunity to reach out to parents and work together to improve the Icelandic skills of both adults and their children. Implementation of the action would take the form of a collaboration between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, accredited education providers and local authorities.

Point e) of the action focuses specifically on increasing instruction in Icelandic sign language, as immigrants now make up about a fifth of the deaf community in Iceland, a small language community where it is urgent to effectively develop instruction in Icelandic sign language as a second language. The number of deaf adults has increased significantly since 2022, and their learning opportunities have not been the same as those of deaf children. The overall goal of the action is to make learning Icelandic as a second language diverse, progressive, practical and accessible throughout the country, regardless of whether it is Icelandic or Icelandic sign language.

#### *4.12. Target 3.2– The quality of Icelandic instruction is ensured*

##### *Action 3.2.1. Improving and expanding the group of teachers who instruct in Icelandic as a second language*

As mentioned in Action 3.1.1, major development in the teaching of Icelandic for immigrants is foreseen. Until now, few persons have had the teaching of Icelandic as a second language as their main occupation, and therefore parts a) and b) of the action concern the strengthening of the teaching profession in this field. Point a) looks specifically at the new teachers who will graduate and will, therefore, be reached through teacher training at the university level. In tandem with this, the number of teachers and instructors currently employed who are teaching Icelandic as a second language needs to be increased, by offering continuing education options. In addition, special training needs to be offered in the application of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that is currently being implemented (cf. the discussion in Action 3.1.1.). Thus, those who teach Icelandic as a second language should receive training in teaching based on the skill levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, using study materials and offering placement tests. This action supports three actions in the Parliamentary Resolution on an Action Plan for the Icelandic Language for 2024-2026, dealing specifically with improved quality work, on the application of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and on the professional development and qualifications of teachers of Icelandic as a second language.

In adult education, it is important to have active user consultation, especially in instruction that is undergoing as much development as Icelandic instruction for immigrants. In 2023, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour commissioned two user evaluations of Icelandic courses for immigrants. One of them was carried out by the University of Akureyri as *Samfélög án aðgreiningar: Mat innflytjenda á eigin færni í íslensku* [*Inclusive Societies: Immigrants' assessment of their own ability in Icelandic*] and the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland assessed the quality system of education providers who received grants for Icelandic instruction in 2022 and made various proposals on how to increase quality, visibility and results. In this way, important information has been collected, which must be followed up on with a new survey dealing with similar aspects. The action therefore provides for such a survey to be carried out again in 2027, to obtain comparable data

on the attitude of users to the quality and usefulness of Icelandic instruction, after the improvement projects described in the previous parts of the action have been implemented.

#### *4.13. Target 3.3 - There is understanding and an incentive to use Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born*

##### *Action 3.3.1. Icelandic as the language of communication for everyone*

Language learning is intended to create opportunities for communication. Immigrants in Iceland have pointed out that they are not given enough opportunities to use their Icelandic skills while they are acquiring them. The action on Icelandic as a language of communication for everyone is intended to increase opportunities for the use of Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born and create opportunities for language learning and support through everyday communication.

Point a) involves a special two-year project aimed at increasing tolerance of diverse use of Icelandic and encouraging the use of Icelandic in communication with immigrants in Iceland. The goal of such an initiative is to increase public awareness and participation in supporting immigrants' Icelandic learning. Points a) and b) of the action link this consciousness-raising with the encouragement of greater use of Icelandic in communication between immigrants and native-born. An example of such a project is, among other things, the innovative activities of the University Centre of the West Fjords, which has been responsible for the project *Gefum íslensku séns* (Give Icelandic a chance). It aims to build an Icelandic-friendly society that promotes increased opportunities for everyone to learn and use the Icelandic language in communication.

Little is known about the actual attitudes and possible difference in attitudes between native-born and immigrants towards use of Icelandic in communication. The intention is therefore to measure such attitudes after points a) and b) of the action have been implemented, creating an opportunity to assess whether further action is needed in the next National Action Plan or whether the targets of the policy have been achieved through the actions implemented. The text refers to Icelandic interlanguage, a scientific term in linguistics which refers to the wide variety of Icelandic used as a second language. It covers pronunciation, word order, vocabulary and thus language use as a whole. The action as a whole is intended to ensure that immigrants experience opportunities to use Icelandic and Icelandic sign language and get support from native speakers of Icelandic or Icelandic sign language in expressing themselves.

#### *4.14. Target 3.4 - Instruction in Icelandic is accessible and flexible*

##### *Action 3.4.1. Diversity of Icelandic studies*

One of the OECD's recommendations for creating language skills among immigrants is to ensure that diverse ways of learning Icelandic are available. The needs of different groups must be met, and two groups have been identified in Iceland that need to receive special attention. They are, on the one hand, shift workers and, on the other hand, immigrants who do not have access to childcare for children under compulsory school age. Therefore, point a) of the action is intended to ensure a development project that is tailored to the needs of these groups and could be developed for the entire country if the results are good. The focus is on areas where the percentage of immigrants is high and the type of local industry means shift work is common. For example, the lives and work of people in the Suðurnes region, where the percentage of immigrants in the population is among the highest in the country, is strongly

characterised by the dominance of shift work, both in primary production and airport-related activities. It is also important to continue making use of self-study opportunities that both support traditional Icelandic learning and are also part of the modern language learning environment. Under part b), work will be directed at supporting the further development of smart solutions that are entirely available to the public, providing practice in Icelandic for immigrants. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has been supporting such projects for several years, and development in this field has been rapid. The action is intended to increase the options of different groups who have less opportunity to attend traditional and on-location language courses, so that more people have the opportunity for study and training in Icelandic than is currently the case. Point c) is aimed at supporting the implementation and development of individualised and flexible language learning, through a dialogue between educational providers and the academic community, sharing expertise and best-practice pedagogical approaches.

## **5. Consultation on strategic planning**

### *5.1. The work process and consultation in general*

A steering group for the drafting of the policy was appointed in mid-January 2023 and began work later that same month. The group included representatives of five ministries: in addition to representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, they came from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education and Children. In addition, there were representatives of the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ), BHM, BSRB and the Icelandic Teachers' Union (KÍ), the Women Of Multicultural Ethnicity Network in Iceland (WOMEN), the School of Humanities of the University of Iceland, the Immigrant Council, the Icelandic Red Cross (RKÍ), the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) and two representatives from the National Association of Local Authorities. A representative of the Directorate of Labour also attended the meetings of the steering group which concerned the drafting of the policy.

Work on a policy on matters of immigrants and refugees has emphasised in particular broad consultation with different stakeholders and ensuring that as many and as diverse voices as possible are heard. During the preparation of the Green Paper, discussions were held with immigrants in two focus groups and with a number of experts in various fields. Preparation of the White Paper included discussions with hundreds of people interviewed at open meetings throughout Iceland. In the process as a whole, well over 550 people have been interviewed directly.

In the preparation of the Green Paper, the steering group met 8 times and held 32 meetings in thematic working groups. In the preparation of the White Paper, the steering group met 13 times and worked on the drafting of the policy. There was also extensive consultation with the public about the policy and practical issues. The aim of this conversation was to obtain the voices of immigrants themselves and to ensure that the key topics examined in the Green Paper and which form the basis of the draft policy reflected the real needs of the immigrants in the estimation of both the immigrants themselves and society as a whole. Twelve meetings were held around the country: 7 open meetings in Akureyri, Borgarnes, Egilsstaðir, Ísafjörður, Reykjanesbær, Reykjavík and Selfoss, and 5 closed focus group meetings with refugees in Akureyri, Bifröst, Reykjanesbær, Reykjanesbær, Reykjavík and Selfoss. A total of 489 people participated in the open conversation. The conclusions of this conversation were analysed specifically to ensure that the emphases expressed would be reflected in this policy.

In tandem with the preparation of the status assessment and the drafting of a policy on matters of immigrants and refugees, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) compiled a detailed analysis of the situation of immigrants in Iceland, which was published on 4 September 2024. The OECD analyses were reviewed and used, along with other data, in the formulation of the policy. The targets are therefore based on actual assessments and reliable data about the state of affairs and the main challenges that need to be addressed in the longer term.

## 5.2. Consultation in the government's consultation portal

As part of the process of drafting this policy and the National Action Plan now available, both a Green Paper and a White Paper were prepared, each of which was made available in the government's consultation portal. A draft of the Parliamentary Resolution was also made available in the consultation portal.

Consultation on the Green Paper on the Matters of Immigrants and Refugees Issues – Status Assessment and Strategic Options through the government's consultation portal lasted from 10 November to 8 December 2023. Comments from a total of 20 parties were received, 17 of them within the time limit for comments and 3 after the time limit had elapsed. The commentators are listed in their alphabetical order in Icelandic: The Icelandic Confederation of Labour; the Icelandic Social Workers' Association; the Icelandic Industrial Educational Centre; the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Iceland; the Icelandic Department of Amnesty International; Jóhanna Björk Sveinbjörnsdóttir; Leikn, the association of adult education providers in Iceland; the Icelandic Human Rights Centre; Mirra, Center for research and education on international migration and ethnic relations; the Icelandic Red Cross; the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre; the City of Reykjavík, the Multicultural Council of the City of Reykjavík; the City of Reykjavík –

ambassadors of residents of foreign origin; the National Association of Local Authorities; the Confederation of Icelandic Employers; the Federation of Icelandic Industries and Confederation of Industry and Icelandic Ed-tech Industry; Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network in Iceland; Símennt, the Association of Education and Lifelong Learning Centres; and the Icelandic Disability Alliance (ÖBÍ).

In general, commentators welcomed the publication of the Green Paper and the work being done to formulate a policy on matters of immigrants and refugees. The importance of having a policy to make actions in this area more effective was pointed out. Suggestions from commentators mainly expressed a desire for more detailed discussion of the issues of individual groups, rather than suggestions concerning the key topics and future vision

Consultation on the draft policy, which was published in a White Paper entitled *A Society for Everyone – Iceland's future and policy on matters of immigrants*, lasted from 24 May to 21 June 2024 through the government's consultation portal. A total of 21 opinions were received, 20 of them within the time limit for comments and one after the time limit had elapsed. Opinions were received from (in their alphabetical order in Icelandic): the Town of Akureyri; Icelandic Confederation of Labour; Federation of State and Municipal Employees; National Agency for Children and Families; the municipality Grímsnes- and Grafningur; Iðan Centre for Continuing Vocational Education; Jovana Pavlovic; Þroskahjálp, an association supporting people with intellectual disabilities; Icelandic Human Rights Centre; Mímir continuing education; Icelandic Red Cross; Town of Reykjanesbær; City of Reykjavík; National Association of Local Authorities; Confederation of Icelandic Employers; Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network in Iceland; Símennt, the Association of Education and

Lifelong Learning Centres; Language School ehf.; Iceland Chamber of Commerce; Zane Brikovska; and the Organisation of Disabled in Iceland.

Commentators generally welcomed the appearance of the first draft of a comprehensive policy on matters of immigrants in Iceland. Suggestions from commentators were of various kinds, most of them relating to the targets and indicators in the White Paper and the draft policy. A suggestion was made that discussion was lacking of individual groups, such as the disabled, or individual subject areas, such as secondary education and validation of competence. Various suggestions were responded to and this is discussed in more detail in the report on the consultation, which was published in the consultation portal.

## 6. Social impact

In the OECD's in-depth analysis of immigration issues, *Skills and Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their Children in Iceland*, which was published on 4 September 2024, the main strengths and weaknesses regarding the situation of immigrants in Iceland in comparison to other OECD countries are reviewed. It points out that Iceland's uniqueness is manifest, among other things, in the high employment participation of immigrants in the country; however, at the same time their education and work experience are not utilised as much as they could be. Educated immigrants are quite often in jobs that do not require specific education, which is both a loss for Icelandic society and the individuals in question. Unlike other Nordic countries, Iceland has devoted scant funding to teaching immigrants the country's national language and the immigrants themselves want more opportunities to learn Icelandic. In addition, they consider low Icelandic skills to be the single biggest obstacle for them on the Icelandic labour market. Icelandic instruction not only needs to be increased for adults, but also for children, and specific actions in education and support for children are necessary. The OECD's conclusion agrees with the response received by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour during the preparation of a Green Paper and later a White Paper on the policy presented here. The groups working on drafting the policy and its actions have focused on addressing the challenges that were revealed. The importance of the government setting out a policy on these issues was also pointed out, to correspond with practices of the Nordic countries and the majority of other OECD countries. It is unusual for a country to present national action plans, as has been done here, without a policy in effect that the action plan is intended to implement.

The OECD also mentions the importance of statistics on immigrants being accessible, and these issues are specifically addressed in collaboration with Statistics Iceland. Immigrants are such a large portion of the population that the publication of data is not as sensitive as previously, as the data is no longer personally identifiable as could be the case when there were few immigrants in a small country.

The social impact of each target has been discussed specifically above and that discussion will not be repeated in this chapter. Taken as a whole, the policy and National Action Plan are intended to achieve a positive social impact. To contribute to the possibilities of individuals who move to Iceland to gain a foothold in Icelandic society and for all residents to create a commonality where freedom and equality and respect for human rights are the main themes.

## 7. Financing of the policy and National Action Plan

A cost estimate of the policy and National Action Plan is in preparation by the ministries and institutions which will be responsible for each action and their follow-up.

## 8. Definitions

Explanations are provided below (in alphabetical order in Icelandic) of the main terms and concepts used as a basis for discussion and understanding in this Parliamentary Resolution.

- a) A second-language speaker refers to someone who speaks Icelandic as a second language. A second language refers to the languages that people learn after learning their mother tongue or first language. Children can acquire more than one language simultaneously and become bilingual or multilingual. Native-born are therefore generally native speakers of Icelandic while immigrants are generally second-language speakers. Immigrants who move to Iceland as children can, however, become bilingual, i.e. native speakers of both Icelandic and their mother tongue, and are not second-language speakers of Icelandic.
- b) The word deaf refers to those people who are hearing-impaired, speak sign language and have sign language as their first language. In the same way that other immigrants do not have Icelandic as their first language, deaf immigrants do not have Icelandic sign language as their first language.
- c) Linguistically diverse refers to the fact that immigrants have different languages as their first language and can also be multilingual, i.e. be native speakers of more than one language. Consideration must be given to linguistic diversity, especially in all studies, and the impact this has on students at different school levels.
- d) Multiculturalism refers to the characteristics of a society which includes different cultures that thrive in their interactions with each other. Multiculturalism is most often used in combinations such as multicultural society or multicultural schooling. Multiculturalism reflects a view that everyone has the right to maintain their own culture and also that it is possible to belong to more than one culture. The term refers to the social cohesion of different cultural groups.
- e) A refugee is a person who is outside their home country or a stateless person who is outside the country where they had a regular residence, because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, and because of such fear cannot or does not wish to avail themselves of the protection of that country. In this policy refugees are those individuals whose status as refugees has been recognised by the Icelandic state.
- f) An immigrant is defined as someone who was born abroad and has parents and grandparents who were all born abroad. An immigrant can be a foreign and/or an Icelandic citizen.
- g) Inclusion is a relatively new term in Icelandic and means that the diversity of people is assumed in all situations. Inclusion refers to the fact that the responsibility for anticipating diversity does not lie with one party, but with many – with the society as a whole as well as individuals within it. Inclusion therefore refers to relationships and systems based on shared responsibility. As such, it differs from terms such as integration, which refers to unidirectional responsibility, where the person who is in a minority is responsible for adapting to the circumstances of the majority. The word is most often used in context with other words, e.g. an inclusive society or inclusive healthcare, to mention some examples.

- h) An inclusive society refers to a specific type of social structure where the diversity of people is always assumed. The society is based on giving everyone the potential for active participation, and decisions are made consciously to ensure opportunities and possibilities for different groups to participate actively in society. An inclusive society is not only based on opportunities for participation, but also ensures that different groups of people have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making in the society.
- i) A native-born person is one who does not fall under the definition of an immigrant. Native-born therefore includes persons with no foreign background, persons with no foreign background who were born abroad, persons who were born in Iceland and have one foreign parent and persons who were born abroad, or have parents who were born abroad but at least one grandparent who was born in Iceland.
- j) Icelandic interlanguage is a language of second-language speakers. It refers to the language use of second-language speakers, including pronunciation, word choice, grammar and sentence structure.
- k) Multiple discrimination refers to a situation where people are discriminated against due to more than one discriminatory parameter, such as by gender and origin, or by gender, origin and disability. The discriminatory parameters have a negative synergistic effect and the person experiences multiple discrimination.
- l) The NEET group refers to young people who are not in education, employment or vocational training. This is an acronym for the English *Not in Education, Employment or Training*.
- m) A foreigner is someone who does not have Icelandic citizenship. Thus, the word refers to persons other than immigrants and includes, for example, all those who visit the country temporarily, for example, to work or as tourists.
- n) Second-generation immigrants are people who were born in Iceland but whose parents are both immigrants.