



# Iceland



The main development was an adoption of a comprehensive gender recognition law which was supplemented by a number of proposals to extend protection from discrimination in access to goods and services and in relation to bias motivated speech and crime against trans people. The Icelandic Parliament also adopted a controversial resolution on surrogacy and calls for the Ministry of Welfare to set up a working group to draft surrogacy legislation which could potentially increase chances for LGBTI people to have children.

## Access to goods and services

- In October, eleven Icelandic MPs announced that they intended to propose a new bill that would extend equal legal protection, in access to goods and services and against bias motivated speech and violence, to trans people. The bill was distributed in parliament on 10 October. It will add the wording 'gender identity' to Articles 180 (goods and services) of the Penal Code, thus extending equal legal protection to trans people in the aforementioned areas of legislation.

## Bias motivated speech

- In July, a homophobic blogger and schoolteacher was sent on six months leave from Brekkuskóli in Akureyri after his blog was discovered. The blog's writings, among other things, lash out against homosexuals. The blogger contends that he is only quoting from the Bible, and exercising his right to freedom of expression. Many parents called for his dismissal, and his position at the school was consequently permanently terminated.

- In August, an ad appeared in the Fréttablaðið newspaper on the morning of Reykjavík Pride 2013 quoting 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." The ad was anonymously placed by the Russian Orthodox Church of Iceland. The priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, Rev. Timur Zolotuskiy, told DV newspaper that the ad was his own initiative and placed anonymously as he did not want to put his name under "the word of God." The priest was visited the following weekend by members of the Radical Sexual Deviants' Activist Group – The Pink Fist. The visit took place during the church's 'open house' held on Reykjavík Culture Night. Members of the Pink Fist read the 'Rainbow Commandment' to the priest, bathed him in glitter and liberated him to love and tolerance towards everyone - without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. Other LGBT activists joined in, sang 'I am what I am' outside the church and engaged in a conversation with the priest and some members of his congregation.

- In October, eleven members of the Icelandic Parliament announced that they intended to propose a new bill that extends the scope of article 233a (bias motivated assault) of the *Penal Code* against bias motivated speech and violence, to trans people.

## Bias motivated violence

- In April, a trans man was attacked by three men at a Reykjavík nightclub for using the men's toilets. The victim did not sue over the assault because he did not want to attract public attention to himself or his family. The victim's friend, who is also trans, said prejudice is rife in Icelandic society and that people in their position are frightened. He described the events on his website, saying his friend was lucky to escape with minor injuries. Samtökin 78, the National Queer Organization, the following week called for tolerance and support for transgender individuals. The organisation also urged Alþingi, the Icelandic Parliament, to complete amendments to the *Penal Code* in order to improve the legal situation of trans people. Trans people do not enjoy any legal protection under current legislation.
- (see also last item in *Bias motivated speech*)

## Family

- In April, the newly elected bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran State Church of Iceland, Agnes M. Sigurðardóttir, stated that she will not act on the current discrimination against LGBT people within the church. Current laws and regulations allow priests of the church, who also happen to be public servants, not to marry same-sex couples, should they choose to act on 'freedom of conscience'. Asked about this discrimination shortly after being elected, Agnes responded: "Freedom of conscience' is respected by law, and I want to make it clear that no one will be forced to do something that their conscience does not allow. There are very few priests who do not feel comfortable marrying people of the same sex, and they have every right to have that opinion. I don't think it's a problem. The matter has already been settled, as far as I'm concerned."
- In August, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association 'Sidmennt' carried out its first same-sex marriage

ceremony when a lesbian couple was wed by Hordur Torfason, one of the association's masters of ceremonies. In 1975 Hordur, a popular actor and singer/songwriter, became a pioneer in the fight for the rights of Icelandic LGBT people when he decided to come out as a gay person in a magazine interview, thus becoming the first Icelandic ever to do so. He then founded Samtökin '78 – The National Lesbian and Gay Organisation in 1978.

'Sidmennt' – The Icelandic Humanist Association has offered a variety of secular ceremonies since 2008, e.g. civil confirmations, weddings and funerals.

- In November, the Mayor of Reykjavík, Jón Gnarr, spoke out online at the protest in Paris on 17 November against marriage equality. He shared a link to online coverage of the protest and posted the simple statement (attributed to American actor Morgan Freeman): "Homophobia is not a phobia. They are not scared. They are just a bunch of assholes."

## Foreign policy

- In April, Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, presented his annual report on foreign affairs to Parliament. The report now includes, for the second time, a special chapter on LGBT issues. In his report the Minister stated that Iceland actively participates in the fight for the human rights and equal social and legal status of LGBT people. He said that Iceland had supported the resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity in June 2011. He also said that Iceland had, amongst other things, supported the EU's position in encouraging states to protect the human rights of LGBT people during the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March. The Minister said that Iceland cooperates closely with other Nordic countries in the fight for LGBT rights and against bias motivated violence; Iceland had closely monitored the situation of LGBT people in African countries that have partnership agreements with Iceland on development cooperation, especially in Malawi and Uganda. He said that in Uganda's case, Iceland was represented in a donor state group on human rights that has LGBT issues on its agenda. Iceland

was also working closely with 'like minded' states on LGBT issues in Malawi. The Minister said that recent introduction of anti-LGBT law in some regions of Russia had given Iceland good reason to follow developments in Russia very closely. He added that Iceland had contacted the governments of Russia, Malawi and Uganda and formally commented on the situation of LGBT people in those countries.

- In September, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Össur Skarphéðinsson, reiterated Iceland's support of the rights of LGBT people, in a speech during the General Debate of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly.
- In December, Minister Össur Skarphéðinsson, said the Icelandic government will do everything in its power to fight against a new homophobic bill in Uganda.

## Freedom of assembly

- In July, the Mayor of Reykjavík, Jón Gnarr, showed his support to the Faroese LGBT community by attending Faroe Pride and providing the keynote speech on stage. In his speech the Mayor addressed the poor legal status of LGBT people in the Faroe Islands. He also praised the efforts of the Faroese LGBT community in putting LGBT rights on the agenda, saying their work was a beacon of hope and watched by many with great admiration. The mayor spoke about the important role capital cities hold in protecting human rights and said the City of Reykjavík was very proud of having supported the Icelandic LGBT community, both financially and politically, for many years. He went on to emphasise the importance of Nordic cooperation in relation to LGBT rights and commended both the municipality of Tórshavn and the Nordic Culture Fund for supporting the Pride. The mayor then reiterated his support for the Faroese LGBT community, extended his thanks for being given the chance to take part in the Pride and said he hoped that Faroese LGBT people will soon be able to enjoy all the rights their cousins in Iceland already do.
- In September, Jón Gnarr, the Mayor of Reykjavík, wrote an open letter to Sergey Sobyenin, the Mayor of Moscow, in which he called for the lifting of the ban on LGBT prides. Mr Gnarr expressed his view that the ban is a clear violation of human rights.

## Health

- In February, a study of LGBT youth in 10th grade, launched from the University of Akureyri, showed that one third of LGBT youth had attempted to commit suicide. Moreover the study showed that about 40% of young lesbians have attempted suicide 1-4 times and about 18% of the young gay men interviewed. About 21% of young gay men have attempted suicide 5 times or more where this was only the case with 5% of the young lesbians.
- In November, the Minister of Welfare, Guðbjartur Hannesson, stated that the rules on blood donations which prevent gay men donating blood will not be changed.

## Human rights defenders

- In August, Jón Gnarr, the Mayor of Reykjavík, dressed up as one of the members of the Russian feminist band, Pussy Riot, in the Reykjavík Pride march, demanding their release.

## Legal gender recognition

- In June, the Icelandic Parliament, Alþingi unanimously adopted a new comprehensive *Act on legal status of individuals with 'Gender Identity Disorder' (GID)*. The bill for the new law was drafted by a special five-member Commission on the legal status of trans people, which was appointed by the Minister of Welfare in March 2011. Trans-Ísland, the National Organisation of Trans People, and The Icelandic Human Rights Centre each appointed a representative to the commission. The law is in accordance with the government coalition platform from 2009, where the Social Democratic Alliance and their junior coalition partner, The Left-Green Movement, committed themselves to improving the legal status of trans people in the country – a move previously recommended by the Parliament's Ombudsman. The new law entered into force on 27 June.

## Participation in public/political life

- In May, IGLA, International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics championships, took place in Reykjavik, Iceland. Around one thousand contestants from all over the world took

part in the championships, making IGLA in Reykjavik one of the biggest aquatic sport events that have ever been held in Iceland.

- In August, two LGBT exhibitions, *Into the Daylight – Queer History in the Archives* and *Queer Days in Pictures*, were held at Reykjavik City Hall during Reykjavik Pride. *Queer History in the Archives* was an exhibition arranged by Reykjavik City Archives, displaying a selection of documents and publications that cast a light on Icelandic LGBT History. The exhibition was based on documents from Samtökin '78 – The National Queer Organisation, which are now part of the City Archives. *Queer Days in Pictures* was a selection of photographs by two Icelandic photographers, showing the history of Reykjavik Pride and Queer Days.
- In August, the documentary 'Hrafnhildur' was released. The documentary, which follows the life of an Icelandic trans woman, not only got good reviews in Iceland, but it also appealed to a large audience of cinema goers. Over 1,500 people had seen it within the first three weeks, which makes 'Hrafnhildur' the most popular documentary in Iceland to date.
- In November, the Reykjavik Sports Union bid to host the World Outgames in 2017. The only other competing venue is Miami Beach in Florida, USA. The bid is supported by the City of Reykjavik, the Icelandic Government, the National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland, Visit Reykjavik, Meet in Reykjavik, Samtökin'78, Pink Iceland, Styrmir Sports Club and SagaEvents.
- In November, the LGBT travel agency Pink Iceland was awarded the Icelandic travel industry's Innovation Prize. The prize was handed over, at a ceremony, by the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson.

## Sexual and reproductive rights

- In January, Alþingi, the Icelandic Parliament passed a controversial resolution on surrogacy. Iceland currently has no clear laws on surrogacy but recent opinion polls have shown up to 87% of Icelanders favour legislation that would allow for surrogate mothers. However, a majority of those institutions and NGOs asked to review the draft resolution, including the Centre for Ethics at the University

of Iceland, The Centre for Gender Equality and the Icelandic Medical Association, raised concerns about the matter or directly opposed the measure. The resolution defines “the mother” as the woman who raises the child; not the woman who gives birth to it. However, it also specified that “no binding contract [between hopeful parents and a surrogate] will ever take precedence over the clear right to one’s own body.” The resolution calls for the Minister of Welfare to set up a working group to draft legislation on surrogacy. The legalisation of surrogacy could possibly increase chances for LGBT people to have children. This is a viewpoint that has been used by some proponents of the resolution – especially with regards to male couples. However, the Icelandic LGBT community remains heavily divided on the issue and the board of Samtökin ’78, The National Queer Organization, therefore chose not to take one side over the other in its review to the parliament. Although not taking sides, the board stated that it wanted to include a trans perspective in the debate while emphasising equal access to surrogacy, should the measure become legal.

## **Member organisations of ILGA-Europe**

Samtökin ’78  
[www.samtokin78.is](http://www.samtokin78.is)