



european network against racism

# ENAR Shadow Report 2011-2012

## ENAR SHADOW REPORT

### **Racism and related discriminatory practices in Iceland**

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Racism is a reality in the lives of many ethnic and religious minorities in the EU. However, the extent and manifestations of this reality are often unknown and undocumented, especially in official data sources, meaning that it can be difficult to analyse the situation and to establish solutions to it.

The ENAR Shadow Reports are produced to fill the gaps in the official and academic data, to offer an alternative to that data and to offer an NGO perspective on the realities of racism in the EU and its Member States. NGO reports are, by their nature, based on many sources of data - official, unofficial, academic and experiential. This allows access to information which, while sometimes not backed up by the rigours of academic standards, provides the vital perspective of those that either are or work directly with those affected by racism. It is this that gives NGO reports their added value, complementing academic and official reporting.

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## 1. Executive summary

ENAR's Shadow Reports compile information and data collected by its member organisations, an extensive network of NGOs working on anti-racism, the protection of human rights and the provision of legal and other support to those facing discrimination, unequal treatment and marginalisation in the European Union.

The ENAR Shadow Reports are published each year to fill the gaps in the official and academic data and to offer an NGO perspective on the realities of racism within the EU. NGO reports are, by their nature, based on many sources of data, official, unofficial, academic and experiential. This allows access to information which, while sometimes not backed up by the rigours of academic standards, provides the vital perspective of those that either are or work directly with those affected by racism. It is this that gives NGO reports their added value, complementing academic and official reporting.

The special focus of this first ENAR report on Iceland is Muslim Communities. The time period covered is from March 2011 to March 2012.

This report found that Islamophobia is a concern in Iceland. The manifestations of Islamophobia are often not immediately obvious, possibly due to the fact that the Muslim community in Iceland is not very visible. Nonetheless, we have found that members of the Muslim community frequently encounter stereotyping and discrimination. Representatives of the Muslim community interviewed in the preparation of this report stated that little research has been conducted in this field.

Asylum seekers are also vulnerable. There is consensus among those NGO's interviewed that asylum seekers are victims of stereotyping and prejudice.

The main recommendations of the report are:

**Asylum seekers:** The centre for Asylum seekers should be moved to Reykjavik, or failing that, a second centre should be opened there. Isolating asylum seekers from the rest of society impedes understanding of their plight and reinforces stereotypes, prejudice and contempt.

**Employment.** Statistics indicate that immigrants face higher levels of unemployment than the general population. Research should be conducted in order to discover the reasons for this and remedy the situation if possible.

**Education.** Authorities should monitor the drop out amongst immigrants more closely and provide support for individuals who wish to continue with their education. The language is the key in integrating and a prerequisite for citizenship authorities. Increased efforts should be made to support and promote Icelandic language classes for immigrants.

**Housing.** Authorities should make every effort to prevent *de facto* segregation in housing.

**Health service.** The healthcare system is good and generally endeavours to reach vulnerable groups. However, the cost of interpretation means that language barriers cause considerable difficulty. We recommend that the system be reformed so that a special fund is allocated for interpretation costs and the cost need not be met from each hospital's individual budget. .

**Criminal justice.** According to statistics there are no racially motivated crimes in Iceland. Authorities should investigate the reasons for the lack of prosecutions under Article 233a of the Penal Code.

Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation would be an important step in the fight against racism. Legislation regulating the media should provide sanctions for hate speech.

The state should consider introducing an Ombudsman for Racial Justice.

**Media.** It is important that there are positive TV shows about immigrants, especially Muslims. The aim should be to show that such groups are a part of daily life in society. The media should take measures to increase recruitment of journalists and TV presenters who belong to ethnic and religious minority groups.

The media should take care to avoid associating immigrants with crime.

**Religion.** In order to improve religious equality, the Reykjavik municipality should allow Muslims to build a Mosque as soon as possible.

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### 3. Introduction

This report explores racism and related discrimination in Iceland. We will review policy, legal provisions and their implementation and provide an NGO and victim perspective of the situation. The report focuses on the difficulties faced by the Muslim community but will also discuss other vulnerable groups including immigrants and asylum seekers. The report covers the period from March 2011 to March 2012. Since this is the first ENAR Shadow Report on Iceland it will be necessary to discuss developments from outside of this timeframe in order to put recent events into context.

The inhabitants of Iceland originated mostly from Norway and Ireland between the years 874 to 930 when the whole of Icelandic lowland was inhabited.<sup>1</sup> The population rose to about around 70 000 people<sup>2</sup>. At that time, the climate was temperate, but shortly became colder and less hospitable. After a particularly cold period in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the population decreased to approximately 47,000 people, dispersed throughout the country.<sup>3</sup> While the Icelandic population has since recovered, very few people have immigrated to the country over the years. On the other hand, many have left Iceland. Thousands of people moved to Canada and the United States in the late 1900s and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Around 1950, approximately 180 000 people lived in Iceland of which just 2% were foreign citizens. That proportion remained steady until the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, Icelandic society was very homogenous. There was little ethnic diversity within the population and the majority professed the same religious belief (Evangelical Lutheran).

When the American army came by mutual agreement to Iceland in the year 1951 the Icelandic government made a secret agreement with the American government that no 'coloured' soldiers should be allowed to be in the army.<sup>6</sup> That agreement lasted many decades.

Thus, multiculturalism in Iceland has had a very short history. At the beginning of 2012 the Icelandic population was 320 000 people of whom 20 957 or 6.6% were foreign nationals.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of 2011 there were 25 693 immigrants.<sup>8</sup> 43% of all immigrants in Iceland come from Poland i.e. 9043 individuals.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.handritinheima.is/sagan/upphafritunar/runir.htm> last visited Sept. 15th 2012

<sup>2</sup> No consensus on this but numbers from 40-80 000 have been suggested

<sup>3</sup> Hagskinna: Sögulegar hagtölur um Ísland. (The Historical Population of Iceland). Editors G. Jónsson and M.S. Magnusson. Rvk 1997, p.7 (Population 1801)

<sup>4</sup> <http://visindavefur.hi.is/svar.php?id=5525>. Last visited 08-29-2012

<sup>5</sup> Önnudóttir, Eva Heiða, 'Viðhorf Íslendinga til innflytjenda á Íslandi' Bifröst Journal of Social Science - 3 (2009). (a survey in which Icelandic citizens were asked about their views on immigrants in Iceland)

<sup>6</sup> Ingimundarson, Valur, Uppgjörð við umheiminn, p 69-74

<sup>7</sup> Jónsson, Ari Klængur and Arnardóttir Elsa 'Tölfræðilegar upplýsingar um erlenda ríkisborgara á Íslandi' (Statistic about foreign citizens in Iceland). Fjölmenningarsetur (MulticulturalCentre), Ísafjörður 2012.

<sup>8</sup> ibid p. 4

<sup>9</sup> ibid p. 10

In the autumn of 2008 the Icelandic economy collapsed.<sup>10</sup> That year around 4415 people were granted permission to stay in Iceland. In 2011 this number decreased to 3212.

Two out of three of foreign nationals live in the capital Reykjavik and surrounding towns. 10% of inhabitants in the Vest fjords have foreign citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this increase in the number of foreign nationals, the Icelandic government did not develop a comprehensive strategy for the integration of immigrants until the beginning of 2007.<sup>12</sup> The main objective of the policy was to ensure that all citizens are active participants in the community.<sup>13</sup> The introduction states, among other things, that "Icelandic society has all the potential to be a leader in terms of success and mutual adaptation of those existing in the country and new residents of foreign origin. There is much at stake and Icelanders can learn from the experience of other nations. Immigrants in Iceland contribute in many ways to the society. Icelanders enjoy the uniqueness that immigrants are active participants in the economy of the nation and impose its taxes and duties to the community. It is our goal that all who live here have an equal opportunity to participate in the community, enjoy the quality of the country and the law and contribute to it. To this end, the government, institutions, industries, municipalities, cultural institutions, NGOs, citizens and immigrants themselves must work together".

This report focuses on the situation of the Muslim communities in Iceland. Muslims are one of the most vulnerable groups in Iceland. According to the report of ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) Muslims in Iceland feel that Islamophobia has become institutionalised and that the situation is worse than it was five years ago.<sup>14</sup> NGOs contacted in the course of writing this report have confirmed this.

No major legal changes have taken place in the period March 2011-2012 but the Ministry of Interior announced last June that a new law on foreigners was being prepared in the Ministry.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See f.ex. Jóhannesson, Th. Guðni; Hrunið, Ísland á barmi gjaldþrots, JPV,Rvk. 2009

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Önnudóttir, Eva Heiða, p. 69

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* p. 69

<sup>14</sup> ECRI Report on Iceland published on 21 February 2012 para 103.

<sup>15</sup> Skýrsla nefndar um málefni útlendinga utan Evrópska efnahagssvæðisins. Innanríkiráðuneytið 2012. . (Report on the issue of foreigners from outside the European Economic Area Ministry of Interior, 2012).

## 4. Significant developments in the country during the period under review

There has been considerable political change during the period under review. A new government took over after the economic collapse in 2008<sup>16</sup> and many human rights activists hope that the new authorities will take a stronger interest in human rights than their predecessors. 'The wind is blowing with positive changes', one said. 'But not much has happened yet.'<sup>17</sup> A report on foreign nationals immigrating to Iceland from outside the EEA area was published last June. Significant changes were proposed particularly for the benefit of asylum seekers.<sup>18</sup> A new law aiming to increase social inclusion of immigrants was submitted to Parliament but has not yet been enacted.<sup>19</sup>

Another bill is currently making its way through parliament concerning religious groups.<sup>20</sup> The law is intended to increase equality between religious and philosophical groups.

The Ministry of the Interior is working on a national human rights plan and held open preparatory meetings last winter (2012).<sup>21</sup> The Minister of the Interior has reported that he will accelerate the process for seeking asylum and make the process more humane. The Ministry of Welfare is preparing a bill to implement Directives 2000/43EC and 2000/78/EC respectively on racial discrimination and other discrimination in the labour market.<sup>22</sup> There is some doubt as to whether this will actually enhance non-discrimination in the job market in practice.

Iceland's immigrant population grew steadily until the economic collapse in 2008. Since then the population has decreased slightly.<sup>23</sup> Many people have left due to difficulties in the labour market and fewer have arrived for the same reason.

**While no major legal reforms were introduced concerning foreign nationals, relevant legislation is currently being prepared. Similarly, there have been no major changes to migration, asylum and integration policies, but authorities are working on reforms.**

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<sup>16</sup> The first left wing government of the Republic of Iceland was elected in the year 2009

<sup>17</sup> An interview conducted as part of this report

<sup>18</sup> Skýrsla nefndar um málefni útlendinga utan Evrópska efnahagssvæðisins. Innanríkiráðuneytið 2012. (Report on the issue of foreigners from outside the European Economic Area the Ministry of Interior, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/dba-bin/Aferill.pl?ltg=140&mnr=555> last visited Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/dba-bin/Aferill.pl?ltg=141&mnr=132> Last visited Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.innanrikisraduneyti.is/frettir/nr/28243> Last visited Oct 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>22</sup>

<http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/leit?q=Directives+2000%2F43EC+and+2000%2F78%2FEC+>

Last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>23</sup> Önnudóttir, Eva Heiða...p. 4

2011-2012 has seen little or no change in public perceptions, political discourse or attitudes from the previous year regarding society's most vulnerable groups.<sup>24</sup> There has however been an increase in negative discourse concerning asylum seekers.<sup>25</sup> No political party in parliament has incorporated xenophobia into its political agenda. However, in July 2012 a number of prominent members of the Independent party criticised the government for being too lenient towards asylum seekers.<sup>26</sup> In general, worry and anger in the aftermath of the economic collapse do not seem to have been directed towards immigrants. This may be partly explained by the fact that most foreign nationals are employed in the fishing industry, cleaning jobs and other badly paid, undesirable positions.

A survey revealed that people are prejudiced towards those with different cultural backgrounds and also that this prejudice gained ground between the years 2005 and 2008.<sup>27</sup> 47.3% (2005) and 39.5% (2008) of people said, when asked, that people of *similar background* should be allowed to move to Iceland. In contrast only 29% (2005) and 26% (2008) said that people of *different ethnic background* should be allowed to move to the country. While we do not have a more recent survey on the matter, there is no reason to believe the situation has improved since 2008.

In the last decade there have been a number of legal developments concerning integration/inclusion of migrants and ethnic and religious minorities. An action plan was formed in the year 2007.<sup>28</sup> Local integration policies have been implemented in the municipalities of Reykjavik<sup>29</sup> and Akureyri<sup>30</sup> and several other municipalities. NGOs have been involved in this process. However most of the other Municipalities have no such action plans for integration.

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<sup>24</sup> According to an interview conducted as a part of this report

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.dv.is/frettir/2012/8/29/flottamenn-gerdir-ad-aumingjum/> last visited oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012  
<http://www.dv.is/frettir/2012/7/25/morgunbladid-hjolar-i-flottamenn/>

<sup>26</sup> see f. ex. Morgublaðið, editors column, July 25th 2012

<sup>27</sup> Önnudóttir, Eva Heiða....p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Parliamentary Resolution on an action plan on immigrant issues submitted to the Althingi at its 135th legislative session, 2007-2008.

<sup>29</sup> [<sup>30</sup> \[http://www.akureyri.is/static/files/vefmyndir/akureyri/pdf/Fjolmenningarstefna\\\_Ak.pdf\]\(http://www.akureyri.is/static/files/vefmyndir/akureyri/pdf/Fjolmenningarstefna\_Ak.pdf\) Last visited Oct. 5 th. 2012](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:v-2SkP06ZQkJ:www.reykjavik.is/Portaldatal/1/Resources/skjol/stjornkerfi/stefnumorkun/fjolmenningarstefna.pdf+fj%C3% . Last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

## 5. Special focus: Islamophobia

There are no official statistics on the size of the Muslim population in Iceland. 'The Association of Muslims' which is a registered religious community has 450 members. The 'Muslim Cultural Centre' has 275 members.<sup>31</sup> While the exact size of the Muslim population is unknown, community leaders estimate the number to be somewhere between 1500 and 3000.

Residence permits are tied to work permits and, because Iceland is part of the EEA agreement,<sup>32</sup> few people from outside the EEA are granted residency permits. Permits to stay are mostly based on family re-union. The Muslim population has as a consequence not increased as it would have if citizens of the world were eligible on equal footing to reside in Iceland.

There have been few reports of racially motivated violence against Muslims. There are no regions in the country where the relations between the Muslim community and the rest of the population are particularly tense or problematic. The great majority of Muslims live in Reykjavik and the surrounding area.

We have no data with which to compare the situation of Muslim communities to that of other groups vulnerable to racism or related discrimination in the Icelandic context. However, many Icelanders believe that Iceland is and should be a Christian country, free from Islam and at least from Mosques. Some journalists have linked the building of mosques to the threat of terrorism. The negative perception of asylum seekers can in part be explained by Islamophobia since a high proportion of asylum seekers are Muslim.<sup>33</sup>

In autumn 2008 eight families fled appalling conditions in Al-Waleed refugee camp and received asylum in Akranes on the initiative of the Government. All of these were single mothers with children, of Palestinian origin, who had spent their lives in Iraq. The women and children were met with compassion by the general public. However, their welcome was ridiculed by some who expressed concern that 'more such' people could follow. Those who opposed the arrival of asylum seekers referred to the Islamic faith of the asylum seekers in support of their case.<sup>34</sup>

ECRI has pointed out that immigrant women in general are a particularly vulnerable group.<sup>35</sup> Those women whose residence permits depend on their marriage are especially at risk because the law provides that they must leave the country or get residence permit on a new ground in case of divorce. This may increase vulnerability to domestic violence. Icelandic authorities have not revised the law in order to ensure that a woman seeking a divorce because of

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.hagstofa.is/Hagtolur/Mannfjoldi/Trufelog> last visited 08-29-12

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.efta.int/eea/eea-agreement.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.utl.is/images/stories/Arsskyrsla2010.pdf> p. 19 Last visited 08-29-12

<sup>34</sup> Jónsdóttir, Sigríður Víðis, Ríkisfang ekkert (No citizenship) Forlagið Rvk. 2011

<sup>35</sup> ECRI report para 98-101.

domestic violence will be allowed to remain in the country. The authorities have however promised to be open minded in this matter take into account the special circumstances of these women (article 13(6) of the Act on Foreigners.) Many NGOs have criticised this and believe that the right to residence should be legally guaranteed for victims of domestic violence.<sup>36</sup>

The authorities are aware of the vulnerable position of immigrant women and have published a booklet in ten languages including Arabic where women can read about their rights. The booklet provides information on divorce rules, child custody and rules of residence. In 2011 women from 36 countries sought help in the Women Shelter.<sup>37</sup> While the majority of the women interviewed were Icelandic, a disproportionate number of foreign women used the Shelter. One possible explanation is that women who have immigrated may have fewer networks of family and friends to provide help than Icelandic women. No statistics are available on how many of these women were Muslims.

There have been no efforts to monitor racism and racist discrimination towards Muslims in Iceland. However, for many of those interviewed, Islamophobia is an everyday occurrence. Racist statements about Muslims in online comments and blogs are common.

One Christian TV station regularly expresses racist attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. A privately owned radio station is also known for expressing racist views.<sup>38</sup>

There are some serious weaknesses in the new legislation on the media<sup>39</sup> in that, while hate speech is prohibited in the media, only incitement to commit punishable acts is sanctioned under the Act but not hate speech itself. The Act does not cover social media, even though this is where much hate speech is expressed.

Muslims in Iceland do not have a Mosque. This issue has been pending for more than 14 years.<sup>40</sup> The Muslim Association submitted its application for land and planning permission to the Reykjavik Municipality in 1999 and since then no decision has been taken.<sup>41</sup> Many see this as a clear sign of religious intolerance and an indication that Muslims, as a religious group, are not welcome in Iceland. While some bloggers make it clear that they do not consider Muslims welcome, this idea is never fully articulated in politics.<sup>42</sup> According to the Reykjavik municipality a particular plot is under surveillance.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This situation has been a matter of controversy in the media but not lately.

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.kvennaathvarf.is/media/arsskyrslur/SUK\\_2011-tp1.pdf](http://www.kvennaathvarf.is/media/arsskyrslur/SUK_2011-tp1.pdf) last visited 03-09-2012

<sup>38</sup> Opinion of those interviewed.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2011.038.html>

<sup>40</sup> ECRI, third report on Iceland para 105

<sup>41</sup> A decision had not been taken as of July 2012

<sup>42</sup> There are no so-called extremist parties in the parliament

<sup>43</sup> July 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, Memorandum from the City of Reykjavik to the author of this report

An immigrant Muslim woman in her forties discussed her experiences with us: *'We are not treated worse than other foreigners. You can though say that people are more satisfied with the Polish people: "They are good workers" On the other hand people say of the Polish: "They take the work from us Icelanders". "People are not against us, but they are not content with certain things for example our plans to build a mosque." She goes on: We are victims of stereotyping and this is how it works: I needed a job and asked my friend to help me. She came to me very proud. She had got a job for me, a cleaning job. She knew of course that I held a university degree and so did she'*

She continues: *'What matters is the integration. People have to integrate. People have to mix, know each other and so destroy the stereotyping. If we get acquainted to each other people will stop looking at us as terrorists. What is most important in that respect is the language. Icelandic is a key to integration and on the job market.'*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> An interview with a Muslim woman. A number of members of the Muslim community were interviewed in the course of this report

## 6. Access and full participation in all collective areas of society

### 6.1.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in employment

In this chapter we will discuss the key challenges in our national context concerning full access to employment. We will give special consideration to the employment situation faced by members of the Muslim community.

People from outside the EEA face great difficulties in obtaining residence permits. Employers must show that the vacancy cannot be filled by someone from within the EEA. There are only limited opportunities to obtain a residence permit without a working permit.<sup>45</sup> It is possible to obtain a residence permit through the family reunion mechanism.<sup>46</sup> Asylum seekers may reside in Iceland while their request is pending, and of course, may remain if their application is successful. There are several other possible ways of qualifying for a residence permit such as being a student<sup>47</sup> or a sportsperson.<sup>48</sup> However, in most cases, employment is essential.

The financial crisis in 2008 had a serious impact on the labour market. The unemployment rate increased from 1.7 % in 2008 to 8.4% in 2009. This has had a disproportionate impact on immigrants. In 2011, unemployment stood at 7.3%. However, among foreign citizens the rate was 14.3%, rising to 20.3% within the Polish community.<sup>49</sup>

While a significant number of highly qualified immigrants work in high skilled jobs in technology companies,<sup>50</sup> the majority of immigrants work in low pay, low skill jobs. The immigrant workforce is the backbone of the fishing industry around the country. Many immigrants also work in other low skill jobs such as cleaning.

This has contributed to the growth of stereotypes about these groups. In the past a large proportion of those who work in construction were immigrants. However, this industry has collapsed as a result of the 2008 economic crisis.

There are no reports of direct discrimination in recruitment based on ethnicity. However, members of the Muslim community interviewed reported

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<sup>45</sup> Skýrsla um málefni útlendinga (Report on the issue of foreigners from outside the European Economic Area; the Ministry of Interior, 2012). P. 7

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 39

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.37

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p. 33

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.vinnumalastofnun.is/vinnumalastofnun/utgefid-efni-og-talnaefni/skyrslur-og-talnaefni/erlendir-rikisborgarar-talnaefni-og-skyrslur/> Last visited 21st of September 2012

<sup>50</sup> DeCode genetics a biopharmaceutical company based in Reykjavík is one example

experiencing considerable difficulty in securing a job.<sup>51</sup> Some noted that this may be tied to Icelandic language skills. A number of those interviewed expressed the opinion that employers tended to use lack of language skills as an excuse for not hiring immigrants.<sup>52</sup>

No research has been conducted on discrimination in recruitment policies. Job seekers are usually asked to provide a picture with their job application.<sup>53</sup> There is a concern that this may disadvantage certain minority groups.

There was no available information on how the wages of immigrants compare with general wage levels in the labour market. The Action Plan from 2007-2008 includes a number of proposals to conduct research on this issue, and in relation to gender.<sup>54</sup> However, as far as we are aware no such research has been carried out to date.

Similarly, there is no information available concerning potential racial tensions or bullying within the workplace. Many NGOs have noted a 'glass ceiling' effect for migrants.<sup>55</sup>

Many immigrants are employed in jobs for which they are overqualified. Because residence permits are so closely tied to employment, many immigrants will accept any job they can find, which will typically be a low paid job without qualification requirements. We have been informed that many employers do not recognise qualifications obtained abroad and do not appreciate the value of an immigrant's language skills or links to his/her country of origin.<sup>56</sup>

A survey from 2010<sup>57</sup> shows that almost half of the respondents had not been able to use their education in full at a job in Iceland. 54% believed they needed to improve their Icelandic language skills to get a job in their field. The same survey revealed that 74% of respondents had not tried to have their education evaluated/validated in Iceland.

As we see in the education chapter of this report, children of immigrants are more likely to leave school early than the rest of the population. Among second generation immigrants there is a wide variety in levels of education. This is not reflected in society at large. There are very few members of ethnic or religious minority groups in high profile jobs such as journalism, TV presenting or government positions. There was considerable public attention when a Muslim woman, Amal Tamini, took a seat for a while as a substitute member of parliament. Another immigrant had also acted as a substitute for a while.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a Muslim citizen conducted as part of this report.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Information obtained through email contact with the Department of Labour

<sup>54</sup> Parliamentary Resplution on an action plan on immigrant issues submitted to the Althingi at its 135th legislative session, 2007-2008.

<sup>55</sup> A number of interviewees expressed this opinion.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> A Survey on the attitudes and conditions of immigrants in Iceland, [www.mcc.is/english/multicultural-centre/new](http://www.mcc.is/english/multicultural-centre/new) Multicultural and Information centre 2010. last visited August 8th 2012.

NGOs have highlighted that there are no immigrants employed in the civil service departments which process immigration matters.

Since 2008 many immigrants have been trapped in unemployment and many have left the country. A high proportion of Polish workers have left the construction industry.

### **6.1.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures to combat employment challenges**

The Department of Labour opened a new electronic system (which facilitates more effective use of the information they have) in November 2010.<sup>58</sup> In 2011 and 2012 attempts were made to make the system more immigrant-friendly in order to ensure that all people entitled to work in Iceland will be on an equal footing.

Recently the Department of Labor completed a project renamed 'Working way'. The goal was to find work for up to 12 months for up to 1500 job seekers in co-operation with the industry. The individuals continued to receive part of their unemployment benefits during the 12 month period.

The result of the campaign is that almost 1400 jobseekers are now employed, of which more than 15% are immigrants. The Department was very pleased with the involvement of foreign nationals in the campaign. They noted that the Icelandic language requirements are very high, and that lack of proficiency in the Icelandic language is one of the biggest obstacles to recruitment for immigrants.<sup>59</sup>

At present immigrants make up around 25% of those who receive assistance from the Department of Labor due to unemployment.<sup>60</sup> Unemployment amongst immigrants is considerably higher than the average and the aim of the institution is to close this gap. They intend to seek the cooperation of employers and others to reach this aim.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> ECRI Report on Iceland 4<sup>th</sup> monitoring circle published on 21 February 2012 art. 57

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a representative from the Department of Labour.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

## **6.2 Racism and related discrimination in education**

### **6.2.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in education**

Elementary schools in Iceland are run by the individual municipalities but must follow the Icelandic national curriculum. A new national curriculum for pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools was set in 2011. It is based on six fundamental pillars of education, one of which is democracy and human rights and another is equality. There was no mention of diversity or respect for the multicultural context of the country.<sup>62</sup>

School dropout rates are higher among immigrant communities than among the general population. According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, 4% of Icelanders aged 16 or over do not enrol in secondary school. Among immigrants of the same age the figure is now 20%, which has decreased from 28% in previous.<sup>63</sup> There are no statistics available regarding dropout rates within the Muslim community. Segregation is not believed to be an issue. While some schools have a higher proportion of immigrant pupils than others, this is due to the fact that immigrants tend to live in certain villages and in certain areas of Reykjavik.

NGO's have noted<sup>64</sup> that there is a lack of attention to language needs i.e. the need for people to learn their mother tongue (other than Icelandic) which is not obligatory in the school system. Learning Icelandic as a second language is not generally facilitated in the school system.

We are not aware of any reports of failure to comply with religious. However, there were a couple of incidents of overreaction when a school principal tried to change the lunch menu in order to accommodate the dietary requirements of Muslim pupils.

### **6.2.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures to combat education challenges**

There have no debates concerning the promotion of intercultural dialogue in schools. According to those interviewed, the Ministry of Education is very positive in this respect and the individual schools are in general doing their best.

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<sup>62</sup> Ecri report on Iceland published 21 February 2012 article 156.

<sup>63</sup> Source: Ministry of education 2011, Tölfræðilegar upplýsingar um erlenda ríkisborgara og innflytjendur á Íslandi . (Statistic about foreign citizens in Iceland) Ísafjörður 1. Apríl 2012. P. 22

<sup>64</sup> Interviews conducted as part of this report

However, standards vary from school to school. Elementary schools are run by the municipalities and thus have different budgets with which to hire expert teachers in intercultural matters. We recommend that the Ministry of Education guarantees that schools everywhere in Iceland are on an equal footing in this respect.

## **6.3 Racism and related discrimination in housing**

### **6.3.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in housing**

While there have been no reported instances where members of the Muslim community experienced hostility from neighbours 22.2%<sup>65</sup> of Icelanders have stated that they do not like Muslims living in their neighbourhood.

Immigrants tend to live in the areas of cities where the rent is cheapest. Most of the immigrants residing in Reykjavik live in the Downtown area (26%) or in Árbær/Breiðholt (19%).<sup>66</sup> (Downtown area is popular but there are many cheap apartments). The same trend can be seen in villages around Iceland.<sup>67</sup> This reinforces the stereotype of immigrants as somehow inferior and creates *de facto* segregation based on ethnicity. While immigrants tend to live in worse conditions than the majority population, this is not a very serious issue because the quality of housing in Iceland remains quite high.

While it is possible that ethnic and religion minority groups encounter discrimination in the private rental market, this is very difficult to monitor. The private rental market is small and disorganised. There are no statistics available. We have heard reports<sup>68</sup> however that immigrants often pay very high rent for small rooms or share property with many people in cramped conditions. They also sometimes rent illegal properties without proper security measures.<sup>69</sup>

There are no statistics available regarding issues faced by the Muslim community.

### **6.3.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures to combat housing challenges**

There have been no relevant measures taken.

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<sup>65</sup> Önnudóttir, Eva Heiða A Survey on the attitudes and conditions of immigrants in Iceland, Bifröst Journal of Social Science - 3 (2009).

<sup>66</sup> Survey on attitudes and conditions of immigrants..

<sup>67</sup> This statement is based on reports from NGO'S.

<sup>68</sup> In interviews and in the national news.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

## 6.4 Racism and related discrimination in health

### 6.4.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in health

Access to healthcare is generally good in Iceland. Although the service is not expensive the cost can nonetheless be problematic for families/individuals with low income. Dental services on the other hand are expensive. This has consequences for low income households.

Immigrants in principle enjoy the same access to healthcare as citizens. While there are cultural and linguistic barriers, we believe that discriminatory attitudes among healthcare professionals are rare.

An NGO<sup>70</sup> which provides support for asylum seekers reports that refugees encounter systematic discrimination. Those whose asylum applications are pending have difficulty obtaining medical attention. They have repeatedly been denied healthcare on various grounds, most of which were based on formalities which should have been resolved easily.

Asylum seekers have access to healthcare in the Municipality in which they are supposed to live. In some instances these problems, mentioned above, arise when an asylum seeker is situated in another municipality.

There is nothing to indicate that individuals with low income and immigrants have lower levels of health than the rest of the population. One exception to this is dental health due to the high cost of dental care, as noted above. Only half of immigrants surveyed reported visiting the dentist once a year.<sup>71</sup>

Linguistic barriers are a concern for many immigrants. By law,<sup>72</sup> everyone has the right to interpretation services when using healthcare services. However, the healthcare centre must pay for this from its own limited budget.<sup>73</sup> NGOs have noted that because funds are limited, many healthcare centres spend as little as possible on translation

There were no relevant developments or statistics relating to discrimination against Muslims in 2011/2012.

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<sup>70</sup> From No Borders a NGO's society supporting asylum seekers.

<sup>71</sup> Survey on attitudes and conditions...

<sup>72</sup> Law on the rights of patients no. 74/1997, art. 5

<sup>73</sup> Survey on attitudes and conditions...

## 6.4.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures to combat health inequalities

Authorities have recognised that many immigrant women are particularly vulnerable in this regard as they have more limited access to relevant information than the population at large. The State has published a booklet providing relevant information about rights, targeted at this group of people. This booklet has been published in nine languages.<sup>74</sup>

In 2001 the Directorate of Health published a booklet for health care staff informing them about multicultural and religious matters.<sup>75</sup>

There were no other notable measures taken to combat health inequalities.

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.jafnretti.is/jafnretti/?D10clD=Page3&ID=123>. Last visited Nóv. 4th 2012

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/hbr/frettir/frettapistlar/nr/29172>. Under the column „Menningarheimar mætast“ you can read about the booklet but the link to the booklet itself no longer exists.

## **6.5 Racism and related discrimination in access to goods and services**

### **6.5.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination with access to goods and services in the public and private sector**

There have been no reports of refusal of entry into shops, transport etc. We have had one report<sup>76</sup> about violence towards two women in a bar because they were wearing headscarves. This incident did not reach the national media and was not reported to the police.

One worrying development is that since the economic crisis many parents with low income cannot afford for their children to participate in sport, music and other activities. A large number of immigrant families face this low income trap.<sup>77</sup>

Pensions are awarded in proportion to time spent in employment and the state guarantees a minimum pension for those aged 67 and older. This should apply to everyone who has worked in Iceland. In 2010, 83% of immigrants claimed to be members of a trade union.<sup>78</sup> This should help ensure that their rights are respected.

Action by the state to promote integration decreased significantly in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Since then funding for Icelandic language classes have fallen sharply.<sup>79</sup> At present, language classes are generally offered outside of working hours which is difficult for those who have already worked a long day. We recommend that language classes be integrated into the working day.

### **6.5.2 Facilitating factor or protective measures to promote equality in accessing goods and services**

No measures have been taken to promote equality in access to goods and services.

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<sup>76</sup> In an interview for this report.

<sup>77</sup> Information from an interview among others a clergyman.

<sup>78</sup> Survey of attitudes and conditions....

<sup>79</sup> 240,1 milljón Icelandic krona was on the State budget the year 2008, 2009 it dropped to 128,1 milljón, 132,3 2010 and 127,7 2012. Source: <http://www.althingi.is/altext/135/s/0507.html>, <http://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2008.177.html>, <http://www.althingi.is/altext/138/s/0594.html>, <http://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2011.185.html>

Last visited Oct. 5th. 2012

## **6.6 Racism and related discrimination in political participation**

### **6.6.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in the realm of political participation.**

Political parties who have members in Parliament do not express xenophobic/anti-immigrant views.

Immigrants can vote in local elections after five years of legal residence in the relevant municipality.<sup>80</sup> Generally after seven years of legal residence in the country they can apply for citizenship.<sup>81</sup> Only citizens are eligible to vote in the Parliamentary elections.<sup>82</sup>

To date, no members of ethnic or religious minority groups have been elected as members of parliament. However, two immigrants – one man and one Muslim woman – have served as substitutes for a few weeks. The same woman was elected to the City council in the second biggest Municipality in Iceland, Hafnarfjord, and also chaired there the Committee of Democracy and Freedom. She was also vice-chair of the National Immigrant Council. However, in general ethnic and religious minority groups are not visible among the political elite. Similarly, there are very few members of minority groups active in civil society.

There are no immigrants in the City or Municipal Councils in Iceland. They are also greatly underrepresented at the upper levels of private companies.

### **6.6.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures to promote equality in political participation**

Diversity is not being leveraged within political parties. Few immigrants are active in party politics or politics in general. Nothing systematic is done to empower vulnerable groups to become more politically active. While political parties often add one or two people of foreign origin to their candidate list, these people are hardly ever put to the fore.

Iceland has not yet incorporated the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) into domestic law.

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/137/1998005.html> art. 2 Last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>81</sup> [http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/ICE%20Act%20100%201952%20\(as%20amended%20in%202007,%20original\).pdf](http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/ICE%20Act%20100%201952%20(as%20amended%20in%202007,%20original).pdf) art. 8 last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2000024.html> art. 1 Last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012

## **6.7 Racism and related discrimination in media**

### **6.7.1 Manifestations of racism and related discrimination in the media, including the internet**

There has been a reduction in the amount of coverage of immigrant issues in the mass media since the economic recession. This reflects lower levels of interest in the issue since 2008. The reason is simple. The coverage is now dominated by economic matters. Immigrants have become less visible in most forms of media. As is the case in many other European countries, when immigrants do feature in the media it is often in connection with criminality and nationality/origin is always mentioned when it is not Icelandic.

Immigrants are otherwise an almost an invisible group in the Icelandic mass media. Their opinion is seldom taken into consideration, especially in television and radio.

Media portrayal of these groups shapes the attitude of the general public and influences integration and immigration policies. The media plays a very important role in integration, identity and belonging.

### **6.7.2 Facilitating factors or protective measures in the media**

While the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RUV) has not established a policy on multiculturalism, the newspaper Morgunblaðið published internal guidelines in 2000 following an incident when the nationality of a foreign citizen was published even though it was irrelevant.<sup>83</sup>

As far as we are aware, nothing is being done to encourage vulnerable groups to become more active in the media.

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<sup>83</sup> These guidelines are only in Icelandic, obtained through email contact. These are very good guidelines from ENAR perspective for journalism in multicultural society.

## 6.8 Racism and related discrimination in criminal justice

### 6.8.1 Policing and ethnic profiling<sup>84</sup>

No research has been undertaken regarding ethnic profiling by the Icelandic police. The Police themselves assert that ethnic profiling 'has not taken place within the Icelandic police and no instructions have been given to do so'.<sup>85</sup>

Immigrants are underrepresented in the police force. There are eight people with an immigrant background in the police force which constitutes a little over 1% of the force.<sup>86</sup> Some immigrants have failed to meet the language requirement.<sup>87</sup> No special arrangements on behalf of the authorities have been made to increase the number of people in the police from immigrant backgrounds.<sup>88</sup>

While NGOs consulted were generally happy with the police force, they expressed concern about the fairness of immigration and asylum seeker control policies.

No statistics are available regarding Muslims and ethnic profiling.

There are no known individual incidents of discrimination or ill-treatment on grounds on nationality, ethnicity, religious belief etc.

### 6.8.2 Racist violence and crime

According to police statistics there have been no racist incidents or crimes motivated by racial hatred.

In order for an offence to be investigated, the victim must decide that they wish for the perpetrator to be prosecuted or, if the offence is sufficiently serious, the police may decide whether or not the offence is to be prosecuted without the involvement of the victim.

According to article 233gr.of the Penal Code<sup>89</sup> it is a criminal offence to ridicule, defame or threaten a person or groups because of race, religion etc.

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<sup>84</sup> The Open Society Institute defines 'ethnic profiling' as the 'use of generalisations grounded in ethnicity, race, national origin, or religion - rather than objective evidence or individual behaviour - as the basis for making law enforcement and/or investigative decisions about who has been or may be involved in criminal activity'.

<sup>85</sup> A memorandum from the police authorities to the author of the report

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/139b/1940019.html> last visited Oct. 5th. 2012

The legal provision does require a complaint as a condition for prosecution. However, this provision has not been very effective.

Icelandic society is very tolerant of racism in public debate, on the radio, on blogs and on social media. While much of this constitutes a criminal offence, police resources are limited and prosecution is rare.

The Muslim community has a low profile in Iceland. A few Individual members are prominent - but not Islamic teaching or the religion itself. "I suspect, says representative from a prominent NGO, "that we wouldn't be very tolerant if the religious community came more to the surface. Deep down, there is a lot of simmering prejudice against Islam and against those who hold the faith and we as a society have done little to eradicate it, such as by means of powerful religious teaching. I am saying," says this NGO "that there is little tension with the Muslim community because their religious practice hasn't been bulky in the Icelandic society<sup>90</sup>."

### 6.8.3 Hate speech

Icelandic law does not tolerate racism in any form. Section 233 a of the Icelandic Penal Code states: 'Anyone who in a ridiculing, slanderous, insulting, threatening or any other manner publicly assaults a person or a group of people on the basis of their nationality, skin colour, race, religion or sexual orientation, shall be fined or jailed for up to 2 years.'<sup>91</sup>In this instance, 'assault' does not necessarily mean physical violence, but can also refer to language used. No one has been prosecuted on these grounds- neither private persons nor public figures. Here we note also that the provisions of the Constitution on the one hand speaks of the equal treatment of all individuals regardless of race religion etc. and also the provision that they cannot in any way lose any of their rights because of religious belief. (The 64th and 65 Articles of the Constitution).<sup>92</sup> Article 180 is also noteworthy in this context. [Anyone in business or service who refuses delivery of goods or services on an equal basis with others on the basis of ethnicity, color, race, religion or sexual orientation shall be fined ... 1) or imprisonment for up to 6 months.<sup>93</sup>

The EU Framework decision on racism and xenophobia has not been transposed in Iceland.

### 6.8.4 Counter terrorism

There is no evidence that counter terrorism has impacted on the Muslim community or any other minority. But terrorism has influenced the atmosphere

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<sup>90</sup> An interview conducted as part of this report with a lawyer specialised in immigration issues

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/139b/1940019.html> Last v. Oct. 5th 2012

<sup>92</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/139b/1944033.html> Last v. Oct. 5th. 2012

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.althingi.is/lagas/137/1940019.html> last v. Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> 2012

in society and led to an increase in Islamophobia. Icelandic society has been impacted by stereotypes from other countries which link Islam to terrorism<sup>94</sup>

### **6.8.5 Facilitating factors or protective measures in criminal justice**

There has been no improvement in data collection procedures or in the availability of statistics on hate crime and/or hate speech.

There has been no political discussion on the acceptability of the use of ethnic profiling. No direct allegations have been made that profiling is practiced.

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<sup>94</sup> the unanimous view of Muslims interviewed.

## 7. Civil society assessment and critique in ensuring protection of fundamental rights

The situation faced by asylum seekers in Iceland needs to be urgently addressed. Legal provisions are complex and over-detailed. The procedure is extremely long. The Directorate of Immigration has too few lawyers. A number of NGOs have called for increased tolerance and humanity in the laws dealing with non-nationals.

The centre for Asylum seekers is located near Keflavik, 40 kilometres from Reykjavik. The process for seeking asylum is long and asylum seekers have little possibility to lead an ordinary life while they wait. A number of NGOs<sup>95</sup> recommend that authorities should change the location to somewhere more central to enable the integration of asylum seekers into society. Many asylum seekers have encountered abuse and harassment in the town near the asylum centre.

Asylum seekers coming to Iceland without proper documentation are taken to court and imprisoned, usually for 30-45 days<sup>96</sup>. Their cases are never appealed. Icelanders who forge documents are usually dealt with leniently by the authorities.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it appears that people are judged differently based on nationality or ethnicity. This pattern is particularly serious in the light of the fact that, in addition to the article 57 (h) on the Act on Foreigners, no 96 from 2002, Article 31(1) of the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>98</sup> stipulates that contracting States 'shall not impose penalties' on asylum seekers because of their illegal entry or presence.

While authorities have displayed a positive approach on some issues relating to racism and discrimination, progress has been much too slow. The 2007 Action plan has not yet been fully implemented.

While no one denies that Islamophobia and xenophobia more broadly are problems in Iceland, nothing has been done to address these issues. Immigrant women remain particularly vulnerable. The children of immigrants also have higher dropout rates and are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities.

Immigrants in Iceland are predominantly employed in low paid jobs and live in areas where apartments are cheap. Society should take a number of steps to address these issues. A broad integration plan is required ensuring integration of children in education and leisure activities. The availability of Icelandic language classes should be increased. A comprehensive anti-discrimination

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<sup>95</sup> NGOs supporting asylum seekers

<sup>96</sup> See <http://www.domstolar.is/reykjanes/domar/> last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012

<sup>97</sup> See <http://www.domstolar.is/reykjanes/domar/> last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/470a33b10.pdf> last visited Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. 2012

law is needed. Equality measures are now scattered through various laws. School children should be taught about anti-racism and discrimination.

## 8. Good practices

**Example of NGO Good Practice in Education.**<sup>99</sup> W.O.M.E.N. Women of Multi Ethnicity Network in Iceland organised educational and empowerment courses entitled 'Get Involved' for various groups of immigrants (such as young educated immigrant women, +30 unemployed women, Polish unemployed men, immigrant women living in isolation etc.) for several years. Courses are free of charge and are funded by grants from Youth in Europe and The Ministry of Welfare. W.O.M.E.N. in Iceland provided classrooms, leaders, guidance and voluntary work. The courses offer an excellent opportunity to build stronger networks among immigrants and connect them with the Icelandic community. 'The Women's Story Circle' is another project which is done in cooperation with Reykjavik City Library. At the story circle the women share experiences, make connections to other immigrants and Icelandic women and learn about various aspects of Icelandic society, current events and trends in Iceland. The women also teach each other skills and knowledge that they have acquired along the way such as knitting, painting, using herbal remedies and communication skills.

**Example of NGO Good Practice in Employment.**<sup>100</sup> - During the 'Get Involved' courses participants received training in writing CV's and cover letters, and job interview skills. Also included in the courses were informative meetings with the Directorate of Labour, employment counsellors and visits to companies in Reykjavik. W.O.M.E.N. is partnered with the University of Iceland, the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, and the Icelandic Human Rights Centre on The European Commission's Progress Programme. This included research about immigrant participation in the labour market and concluded with a 2 day seminar and workshop attended by both Icelanders and specialists from all over Europe.

**Example of NGO Good Practice in Health.**<sup>101</sup> W.O.M.E.N. in Iceland have worked in raising awareness amongst immigrant women in fields of preventive cancer care by organising courses for particular ethnic groups.

**Example of NGO Good Practice in Promoting Political Participation.**<sup>102</sup> Board members of W.O.M.E.N. and other members are active in discussing immigrant issues with all political parties, governmental bodies and often participate in political discussions about issues connected to women and immigrants. Every year we are invited to speak at on 8. March- International Women's Rights Day. As our '30+ Get Involved' campaign was organised during the last elections for the City of Reykjavik participants invited leading candidates from all of the parties to attend a meeting. During the meeting the participants interviewed the candidates and asked them many questions and shared their views about good practice for immigrants in Reykjavik and

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<sup>99</sup> Information from W.O.M.E.N.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

identified improvements that need to be made. Two of the board members are also members of The Ministry of Welfare's Immigration Council. One of the founding members of W.O.M.E.N. in Iceland, Ms Amal Tamini, was a substitute MP in Iceland's parliament.

**Examples of NGO Good Practice in Media:**

National Radio (Rás 1) broadcasted a show covering immigrant issues for some time. Last winter, a popular television food program was presented by an immigrant.

Grapevine, newspaper in English about Iceland, often covers events from the point of view of immigrants.

The chair of Panorama in Iceland (an umbrella NGO's organisation) discussed issues relating to immigrants, racism etc. on a privately owned TV station.

W.O.M.E.N. in Iceland were partners with The University of Iceland on a project to close the gap between the immigrant community and the media i.e. to increase the representation of immigrants in the media. They also conducted research on the way immigrants use the media in Iceland. Both projects are on-going. W.O.M.E.N. received a grant to produce a 4 episode radio series about immigrant contributions to Icelandic culture. The show was called 'Enchanting Heritage' and was created by Edda Jónsdóttir from the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service and aired on national radio.

## 9. National recommendations

**Asylum seekers:** The centre for Asylum seekers should be moved to Reykjavik, or failing that, a second centre should be opened there. Isolating asylum seekers from the rest of society impedes awareness of their plight and reinforces stereotypes, prejudice and contempt.

**Employment.** Statistics indicate that immigrants face higher levels of unemployment than the general population. Research should be conducted in order to discover the reasons for this and remedy the situation if possible.

**Education.** Authorities should monitor the dropout rate amongst immigrants more closely and provide support for individuals who wish to continue with their education. The language is the key in integrating and a prerequisite for citizenship authorities. Increased efforts should be made to support and promote Icelandic language classes for immigrants.

**Housing.** Authorities should make every effort to prevent *de facto* segregation in housing.

**Health service.** The healthcare system is good and generally endeavours to reach vulnerable groups. However, the cost of interpretation means that language barriers cause considerable difficulty. We recommend that the system be reformed so that a special fund is allocated for interpretation costs and the cost need not be met from each hospital's individual budget. .

**Criminal justice.** According to statistics there are no racially motivated crimes in Iceland. Authorities should investigate the reasons for the lack of prosecutions under Article 233a of the Penal Code.

Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation would be an important step in the fight against racism. Legislation regulating the media should provide sanctions for hate speech.

The state should consider introducing an Ombudsman for Racial Justice.

**Media.** It is important that there are positive TV shows about immigrants, especially Muslims. The aim should be to show that such groups are a part of daily life in society. The media should take measures to increase recruitment of journalists and TV presenters who belong to ethnic and religious minority groups.

The media should take care to avoid associating immigrants with crime.

**Religion.** In order to improve religious equality, the Reykjavik municipality should allow Muslims to build a Mosque as soon as possible.

## 10. Conclusion

This report found that Islamophobia<sup>103</sup> is a concern in Iceland. Muslims are frequently victims of stereotyping and discrimination. However, the manifestations of Islamophobia are not always obvious. This may be explained at least in part by the low visibility of the Muslim minority. However, little research has been conducted in this field.

Asylum seekers are also vulnerable. There is consensus among those NGOs interviewed that asylum seekers are victims of stereotyping and prejudice.

Racist sentiments are deeply embedded in Icelandic society and authorities at all levels must take action to combat racism and related forms of discrimination. It is particularly important to target young people by teaching about human rights, equality and respect for other people and other cultures and 'other' religions. Society must actively condemn hate speech and racist attitudes wherever they blossom.

Authorities must strengthen the legal framework and ensure proper implementation at laws designed to combat racism.

There have been a number of positive developments and many people are actively working in administration, in school and NGOs to promote social inclusion regardless of ethnic origin, religion etc.

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## **Annex 1: List of abbreviations and terminology**

Immigrant/immigrant background: refers to first and second generation of immigrants. Those born abroad, not of Icelandic parents, have moved to Iceland and their children.

