

ICELAND:

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL:

SUBMISSION TO THE 54TH SESSION OF THE UPR WORKING GROUP, 18-29 JANUARY 2027

SUMMARY

This submission was prepared for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Iceland in January 2027. It assesses the national human rights framework regarding Iceland.

Regarding the human rights situation on the ground, Amnesty International raises concern about the widespread use of solitary confinement during pre-trial detention, the rights of intersex children and legislation impacting the human rights of refugees and migrants.

It ends with a set of recommendations to Iceland which, if implemented, would contribute to improving the human rights situation.

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FOLLOW UP TO THE PREVIOUS REVIEW

1. During the third Universal Periodic Review cycle, Iceland accepted several recommendations concerning the ratification of international human rights treaties. These included the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) and the individual communications procedures under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OP-CRC) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OP-CRPD).ⁱ To date, these instruments have not been ratified. Iceland has also not ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) or the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR).ⁱⁱ
2. Iceland also accepted recommendations relating to the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and action to address climate change.ⁱⁱⁱ However, these recommendations have not yet been fully implemented. In particular, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has not been incorporated into the Constitution^{iv} or explicitly recognized in domestic legislation. The absence of a clear legal framework limits the protection and enforceability of this right.

THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

3. Amnesty International welcomes the Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2029,^v which was adopted in the Icelandic Parliament at the beginning of the year 2026. It includes measures to strengthen implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)^{vi}, implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)^{vii}, expand gender equality education, promote trauma-informed approaches within the justice system, and improve services for survivors of gender-based violence. The effective implementation of the Action Plan will require clear institutional responsibilities, adequate funding, and sustained monitoring to ensure that its objectives are achieved in practice.
4. Despite Iceland's long-standing commitment to the promotion of human rights internationally, it has not yet expressed clear support for the development of a legally binding UN convention on the rights of older people. Existing international human rights instruments have not adequately addressed the specific forms of discrimination, exclusion, and human rights violations experienced by older people. A dedicated convention would strengthen the protection of older persons' rights, clarify States' obligations and promote a human rights-based approach that recognizes older people as rights holders entitled to equality, dignity, autonomy and full participation in society.^{viii}

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION ON THE GROUND

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Solitary confinement during pre-trial detention

5. The continued widespread use of solitary confinement during pre-trial detention remains a serious human rights concern in Iceland. In its 2023 report, *Waking up to nothing: Harmful and unjustified use of pre-trial solitary confinement in Iceland*,^{ix} Amnesty International found that Iceland overuses pre-trial solitary confinement, that judicial safeguards remain inadequate, and that the practice poses a serious risk of severe psychological harm. In the 10 years from 2012 to 2021, 825 individuals were placed in pre-trial solitary confinement by judges responding, in most instances apparently uncritically, to the requests of police prosecutors. The report also raised concerns regarding its use on children, persons with disabilities and its potentially disproportionate impact on foreign nationals.

6. Although the Ministry of Justice has announced plans^x to review the legal framework governing solitary confinement, including the Code of Criminal Procedure^{xi}, no comprehensive legislative reforms have been adopted. Furthermore, the Icelandic authorities have announced plans for a comprehensive policy framework for the execution of sentences^{xii}, stating that it would include a review of the rules and criteria governing the use of solitary confinement, both in pre-trial detention and as a disciplinary measure in prisons. However, Amnesty International has received no information confirming whether this work has begun or indicating when it will be completed, despite repeatedly requesting an update from the Ministry of Justice^{xiii}.
7. The use of solitary confinement for children in pre-trial detention is of particular concern. In 2022, the UN Committee against Torture raised a series of concerns about the legal framework for solitary confinement in pre-trial detention and its use for prolonged periods and on children and people with disabilities. The Committee cast doubt on Iceland's account of the safeguards used to ensure it was only used when necessary. It also criticized the government for failing to ensure that the legislation defined torture as a specific crime consistent with the UN Convention against Torture. In response, the government stated that it would revise its legislative and procedural framework^{xiv}.
8. Despite repeated recommendations from Amnesty International and the UN Committee against Torture, Iceland continues to subject children to pre-trial solitary confinement. Recent statistics from the Prison and Probation Administration indicate that the practice remains widespread. In 2025, 176 of 280 individuals (62.9%) held in pre-trial detention were subjected to court-ordered solitary confinement^{xv}. Available data also indicates that foreign nationals are disproportionately represented among those subjected to pre-trial detention and solitary confinement^{xvi}.
9. Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concerns about the use of pre-trial solitary confinement on children. In its 2023 research, Amnesty International documented that 10 children aged 15–17 were placed in pre-trial solitary confinement between 2012 and 2021. The report called on Iceland to explicitly prohibit the use of solitary confinement on children, in line with international human rights standards, and to introduce less restrictive alternatives together with stronger legal safeguards.
10. In 2022, the UN Committee against Torture expressed concern about the use of pre-trial solitary confinement on children and recommended that Iceland prohibit the practice. In its 2023 follow-up assessment, the Committee regretted that Iceland had failed to demonstrate how the proposed legislative amendments fully implemented its recommendations and noted the continued lack of comprehensive information and statistical data on the use of solitary confinement in pre-trial detention^{xvii}.
11. Despite these repeated recommendations, Iceland has continued to place children in pre-trial solitary confinement. According to data provided by Prison and probation administration, one child was subjected to pre-trial solitary confinement in 2024 and another in 2025^{xviii}. These cases demonstrate that Iceland has yet to implement the recommendations of the Committee against Torture and to bring its law and practice into compliance with international human rights standards, which prohibit the use of solitary confinement on children.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

12. In 2019, Iceland took an important step towards protecting the rights of children with variations of sex characteristics through the adoption of the Act on Gender Autonomy (No. 80/2019)^{xix} and subsequent amendments^{xx}, which prohibit medically unnecessary interventions on children unable to provide informed consent. However, the working group required under the legislation to develop procedures, coordinate services, and strengthen implementation has not yet been established. This raises concerns about the effective implementation of the legal safeguards and the provision of consistent, rights-based healthcare and support for children with variations of sex characteristics and their families.^{xxi}

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

13. In June 2026, the Parliament adopted the Detention Center Act.^{xxii} Numerous human rights and humanitarian organizations raised serious concerns about the bill before it became law. In February 2026, for example, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, sent a letter to the Parliament's General and Education Committee expressing concern about the inclusion in the bill of the possibility of detaining children for up to a maximum of nine days. The Commissioner urged the Icelandic authorities to amend the bill by excluding the provisions allowing for the detention of children.^{xxiii}
14. Despite these submissions, the Act passed raises several human rights concerns: for instance, it still allows for children to be detained separately from their families^{xxiv}.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY ICELAND

Amnesty International calls on the government of Iceland to:

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

15. Bring legislation and practice on pre-trial solitary confinement in line with international human rights standards, ensuring that it is used only as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible time, and never for more than 15 consecutive days.
16. Revise the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Act on the Execution of Sentences to remove solitary confinement as an investigative measure and introduce less restrictive alternatives.
17. Immediately halt the practices of imposing solitary confinement and similar measures on children.
18. Prohibit the use of solitary confinement on persons whose physical, mental health or disability would be adversely affected.
19. Strengthen procedural safeguards and collect and publish comprehensive, disaggregated data on the use of pre-trial solitary confinement.

LGBTI PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

20. Establish, without further delay, the working group required under the Act on Gender Autonomy and ensure the effective implementation of legal protections for children with variations of sex characteristics through clear procedures, coordinated services and human rights-based healthcare.

REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

21. Amend the newly adopted Act on a Detention Centre to make it consistent with Iceland's human rights obligations, including ensuring that no child, whether unaccompanied or with their family, may be detained in a detention centre.
22. Ensure that domestic legislation and practice fully comply with Iceland's obligations under international human rights and refugee law, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

GENDER VIOLENCE

23. Ensure the timely and effective implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2029 by allocating adequate resources, establishing clear implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and fully integrating gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches across relevant public institutions.

ICELAND

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

24. Recognize and guarantee the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment in the Constitution and domestic legislation.

OLDER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

25. Publicly support the development of a legally binding UN convention on the rights of older people and actively participate in the negotiations to strengthen the international protection of the human rights of older people.

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

26. Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OP-CRC) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OP-CRPD), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR).

ⁱ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Iceland, A/HRC/50/1, Add1, 8 April 2022, recommendations 121.4, 121.5, 121.12, 121.13, 121.14, 121.15, 121.16, 121.18, 121.19, 121.20, 121.21, 121.22 and 12.23 <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/50/7/Add.1>

ⁱⁱ UN Treaty Body database, Iceland, tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=78&Lang=EN (accessed on 17 July 2026)

ⁱⁱⁱ A/HRC/50/1, Add1, 8 April 2022, recommendations 121.118 and 119

^{iv} Constitution of Iceland, 1944. <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/1944033.html>

^v Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2026-2029 2. February 2026. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/mannrettindi-og-jafnretti/jafnretti/framkvæmdaaetlun-i-kynjajafnrettismalum/> (accessed 17. July 2026)

^{vi} Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

^{vii} The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

<https://www.government.is/search/?sort=rank&q=Gender%20action%20plan%202026-2029>

^{viii} Amnesty International, "Global: UN move to draft a convention on rights of older people 'a major step forward', 3 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/global-un-move-to-draft-a-convention-on-rights-of-older-people-a-major-step-forward/>

^{ix} Amnesty International, Iceland: "Waking Up to Nothing": Harmful and Unjustified Use of Pre-Trial Solitary Confinement in Iceland. Index No. EUR 28/6373/2023, 31 January 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur28/6373/2023/en/>

^x Committee against Torture. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 14 (c) of the concluding observations (CAT/C/ISL/CO/4). 31 May 2023 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CAT%2FC%2FISL%2FFCO%2F4&Lang=en

^{xi} Code of Criminal Procedure (No. 88/2008). <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2008088.html>

^{xii} Plans for a comprehensive policy framework for the execution of sentence.5. May 2024. <https://island.is/samradsgatt/mal/3752>

^{xiii} Hanna Rún Sverrisdóttir at The Ministry of Justice. Email to Amnesty International Iceland, 25. April 2024, on file with Amnesty International Iceland.

^{xiv} Committee against Torture. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 14 (c) of the concluding observations (CAT/C/ISL/CO/4), 31 May 2023, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CAT%2FC%2FISL%2FFCO%2F4&Lang=en

^{xv} Hafðis Guðmundsdóttir at The Prison and Probation Administration email to Amnesty International Iceland, 04.03.2026, on file with Amnesty International Iceland.

^{xvi} Hafðis Guðmundsdóttir at The Prison and Probation Administration email to Amnesty International Iceland, 4. March 2026, on file with Amnesty International Iceland.

^{xvii} Committee against Torture, *Request for further clarification* (follow-up to the concluding observations on Iceland's fourth periodic report), 15 September 2023, INT/CAT/FUL/ISL/56188. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en

^{xviii} Hafðis Guðmundsdóttir at The Prison and Probation Administration email to Amnesty International Iceland.,4. March 2026, on file with Amnesty International Iceland.

^{xix} Act on Gender Autonomy (No. 80/2019). <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2019080.html>

^{xx} Act Amending the Act on Gender Autonomy, No. 80/2019 (Variations of Sex Characteristics). 18 December 2020. <https://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2020.154.html>

^{xxi} Amnesty International, Iceland: *No shame in diversity*, EUR 28/9498/2019,19 February 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur28/9498/2019/en/>

^{xxii} Detention Centre Act (No. 48/2026). <https://www.althingi.is/altext/157/s/1340.html>

^{xxiii} Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, letter to the Chair of the Judicial Affairs and Education Committee, 17 February 2026, <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-the-parliament-of-iceland-by-michael-o-flaherty-council-of-e/48802aab82>

^{xxiv} Detention Centre Act (No. 48/2026), Article 7. <https://www.althingi.is/altext/157/s/1340.html>

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