

7 Feminist Laws Iceland Has That the World Needs

Every country should have these laws.

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By a lot of measures, Iceland is the best place to be a woman. Iceland starts gender equality lessons in preschool. The country has not just one, but three, laws protecting women at work. Sick of media, treating women as sex objects? That doesn't fly in Iceland, where a law bans gender discriminatory advertising. Plus, the country was the first to ban strip clubs for feminist reasons.

Overall, the Nordic country has a near perfect score on the gender-equality scale. For eight years, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranked Iceland No. 1 on its list of countries actively closing gaps in gender equality. In 2009, Iceland became the first country to completely close the gender gap in education and health. And in 2016, Iceland was 87% of the way to closing the gender gap in all sectors.

Clearly, Iceland is leading the way, so what are the policies and standards in place that the rest of the world is looking up to?

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Here are seven laws and standard practices that support women's rights, and penalize gender discrimination.

1. Women's Equality Is Literally Protected by Law

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men is the reason gender equality is a hallmark of Icelandic culture. The law, established in 2000, was revamped in 2008 with the overarching goal of reaching equal rights through all paradigms of society. This law includes information on gender equality for government and businesses to follow.

Within the law there are nine defined areas of gender discrimination. It identifies differences between indirect and direct gender discrimination, acknowledges gaps in wages, and recognizes that gender-based violence is detrimental to society.

The law draws out a roadmap to achieving gender equality, even including language on changing negative gender stereotypes. Within the law are 35 articles outlining specific policies on everything from outlawing gender discrimination in schoolbooks and the workplace to buying goods and services.

2. 'Equal Pay For Equal Work' Is Mandatory, Almost

When Icelanders found out it would be another 122 years before they closed the gender pay gap at the current rate, that was unacceptable. Lawmakers took action, announcing on International Women's Day that Iceland would require companies to prove they pay employees equal rates for equal work, or pay the fine.

Parliament is expected to pass the bill becoming the first country to make gender wage discrimination illegal. After passing, the government expects the law to roll into effect by 2020 in an effort to close the gender wage gap.

Currently women make between 14-18% less than men. But the country is soon to ending the last bit of gender inequality in the workplace.

"We want to break down the last of the gender barriers in the workplace," said Thorsteinn Viglundsson, Iceland's social affairs and equality minister. "History has shown that if you want progress, you need to enforce it."

3. Companies' Boards Must Include At Least 40% Women

After the shocking corruption and financial collapse in 2009, the government made an effort to include more women in seats of power to reduce corruption. They also prosecuted those responsible for the financial crisis, unlike in the US.

Article 15 of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men states that no public company board or government council or committee may have less than 40% gender equality. The law also states that any company with more than 25 employees must have a gender equality program in place, which will review goals every three years.

4. Best Parental Leave Policy in the World

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Iceland has the best maternity/paternity policy in the world. The official law, created in 2000, is known as the Icelandic Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave. The law itself was amended in 2006 increasing parental leave from six to nine months. The government covers parental leave for birth, adoption, and foster care for all employees in Iceland, even those who are self-employed paying 80% of earned salary to new parents. Parents split the time of leave equally to ensure children grow up with equal care from both parents, and workplaces are balanced. The policy is truly the gold standard of parental care.

5. From Preschool to College, Kids Learn Gender Equality Matters

After kids grow up with equal time from parents, gender equality lessons don't stop. Article 23 of the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men mandates that gender equality must be taught in schools throughout all levels of education.

That means from early education through university, which is free, all sports, classes, and forms of schooling must include and practice gender equality. Iceland has no time for sexist books or assignments either.

The law states: "educational materials and textbooks shall be designed in such a way as not to discriminate against either sex." So you would never see an assignment, like the school in Utah, which forced girls to go on dates with male classmates, telling girls to "keep it to yourself" if they feel fat.

6. Paying For Sex Is Illegal. Stripclubs Are Illegal. Prostitutes Are Victims.

Paying for sex is illegal in Iceland. It has been for decades. The difference, however, is in 2007 the government amended the law arguing that most people who turn to soliciting sex have no other option or were coerced by others.

So instead of penalizing victims of poor circumstances who are often forced into prostitution, the law places criminalization on those who pay for sex, and third parties involved.

The country also banned stripclubs in 2009 for feminist reasoning. The revised law states no business may profit from nudity of employees. The law passed with full support in parliament. "It is not acceptable that women or people in general are a product to be sold," said Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir who proposed the ban on strip clubs.

This applies to public advertising too. No ad may belittle any gender or go against the country's fierce mission to achieve gender equality.

7. There Is a Magical 'Ministry of Gender Equality'

Ironically, the caveat to achieving gender equality for Nordic countries is taking it for granted. "Our biggest challenge is taking equality for granted. We relax too much. We think everything is done for good. This worries me," said Gro Bruntland, Norway's first female prime minister.

Fortunately, in Iceland, there's a ministry to complacency on gender equality. The ministry of gender equality, as in Harry Potter, is magic. But unlike the fictional novel, this ministry is real. The country created agency to check and balance progress on advancing equality as part of a revisions to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men. The agency includes

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a three part council which includes the Equal Status Council, the Complaints Committee, and a new Centre for Gender Equality.

Together these agencies research, advertise, advocate, and check laws on gender equality. Their goal is to create a legal, cultural, historical, social and psychosocial approach to gender equality.

Global Citizen and CHIME FOR CHANGE are campaigning to eradicating discriminatory laws that hold girls and women back with #LevelTheLaw. Iceland sets the bar high, but they also prove changing the law works to create equal opportunities.