

Draft National Statement of Commitment – Iceland

A. Ensuring full recovery from COVID-19 educational disruption

From the beginning of the pandemic, the Government and the Ministry of Education, Children and Welfare have emphasised the monitoring and safeguarding of the interests of children and young people with a view to reduce the impact of the pandemic on their well-being. Those working at the frontlines in services for children have worked hard to maintain learning, teaching and children's activities during this demanding time. This was possible in light of strong solidarity and solution-oriented attitudes, while taking into consideration experts' advice in the field of disease control and health. A common guiding principle in the work was to ensure continued education, well-being, and safety of children and staff, and every effort was made to keep schools open and the education system running. Currently, the Office of the Medical Director of Health is working on a project under the name *Health-promoting community*, in collaboration and consultation with municipalities, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, etc. with the main goal of supporting communities in creating conditions that promote the health and well-being of all residents. Special focus will be on mental health and preventive action.

B. Identifying the main strategic transformations and levers for reimagining education for the 21st century and accelerating progress towards shared education goals

Inclusive education for all is one of the fundamental elements of the Icelandic school policy. In the 2017 audit of the European Agency of Inclusive Education and Special Needs, the policy was stated to be clear but that on the other hand, the school community did not have a clear idea nor understanding of the concept. In 2018-2019, 23 inclusive consultation meetings were conducted with a view to creating a discussion about the policy.

Since 2018, an extensive revision of Iceland's education policy, laws and social frameworks on matters concerning children has taken place through a wide-ranging consultation process, with a special focus on the participation of children. At the beginning of this year, a new Comprehensive Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity entered into force. The aim of the legislation is to improve children's prosperity, by integrating and strengthening services, while providing a framework for early support with the objective of reducing the need for more severe interventions.

In order to take a more systematic approach to the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, a Policy and an Action Plan - *Child-Friendly Iceland* – was adopted by Parliament in June 2021, based on a wide-ranging and inclusive consultation. The Action Plan includes diverse, arranged and financed actions that aim to increase and improve child participation, the development and implementation of a child rights impact assessment for the Government, and education on children's rights.

Education Policy 2030 is a ten-year education strategy document that establishes Iceland's objective to achieve a dynamic and flexible education system to drive economic and social change. It has the high-level vision 'to accomplish high-quality education through life', underpinned by the values of resilience, courage, knowledge, happiness and sustainability. The strategy document includes five pillars to attain this vision: equity, teaching, skills for the future, well-being and education system quality, under which further objectives and key issues are delineated. Iceland has engaged a broad range of stakeholders in the development of *Education Policy 2030* and is reconsidering its approach to stakeholder engagement, aiming to make roles and responsibilities transparent in relation to the strategy; and develop a clear communication strategy. The OECD has analysed the policy and

consulted key stakeholders to provide recommendations to strengthen the implementability of the policy.

The first action plan for a new education policy has been presented for 2021-2024. The aim was to clarify the vision and development of the Icelandic education system for the future in light of the challenges it faces, e.g. due to rapid social and technological change. The first action plan identifies 9 main actions, but they touch on the five pillars on which a new education policy rests; equal opportunities for all, teaching at the forefront, competence for the future, well-being at the forefront and quality at the forefront. Significant efforts have also been made to make sure that students at all school levels are offered inclusive and equitable education, have equal rights and equal opportunities. To that end, the Parliament adopted in 2021 a resolution on the Education Policy 2030 with the aim to safeguard and strengthen our education system. An integral part of the education policy is to rethink the teachers' preparation and remuneration, support to new teachers and continuous professional development to empower teachers. A competency framework, a teaching council and one license certificate for teachers at pre school, compulsory and upper secondary level has been implemented according to the 2019 Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. The main aim of the act is to ensure that the educational, teaching and administrative staff of these school levels have the education and the competencies to fulfil their tasks and responsibilities.

C. Ensuring strengthened and more sustainable public financing

Recently, a report was written on the financing of compulsory education in Iceland. The report was a collaborative project between the then Ministry of Education and Culture, the Association of Icelandic Municipalities and 13 municipalities, with the aim to examine the education system's ability to operate on the basis of equality, efficiency and effectiveness as well as explore how early support and prevention could be systematically promoted. The project consisted of analyzing the current preconditions for financing the participation of the municipalities, reflecting on and presenting guidelines and proposals for further work, and examining how self-assessment tools for budgeting policies from the European Agency are useful in the Icelandic context. The Association of Icelandic Municipalities, the Compulsory School leaders Association and the Association of School Office Managers in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture now Ministry of Education and Children, has been following the report's results to hold educational and discussion meetings throughout the country to review the report's content.

D. Raising the ambition of national education targets and benchmarks

Iceland's official development policy is largely built on the SDGs, particularly when it comes to the use of Iceland's expertise in advancing the goals. One of Iceland's main goals in international development is the strengthening of socioeconomic structures, and contributing to peace. This includes an increased emphasis on the quality of basic education, increased access to education, and on lowering drop-out rates in disadvantaged societies. Special attention is devoted to girls and the rights of children and youth to protection from violence. Most of the SDG 4 benchmarks are up to date, but the ones remaining are in process. It is important to use various sources of data to guide policy reforms and recommendations and ensure inter sectoral co operation and strengthen the collection of data and relevant use across the system.