

2024

English



Children and Young People

Information for people who have just been granted the status of  
refugees in Iceland

## Children and their rights

People under the age of 18 are classed as children. They are legal minors (they are not able to take on responsibilities according to law) and their parents are their guardians. Parents have a duty to look after their children, care for them and treat them with respect. When parents take important decisions for their children, they should listen to their views and respect them, according to the children's age and maturity. The older the child, the more his or her opinions should count.

- Children have the right to spend time with both their parents, even if the parents do not live together.
- Parents have a duty to protect their children against disrespectful treatment, mental cruelty and physical violence. Parents are not allowed to behave violently towards their children.
- Parents have a duty to provide their children with housing, clothes, food, school equipment and other necessary items.

(This information is from the website of the Children's Ombudsman, <https://www.barn.is/born-og-unglingar/rettindi-barna-og-unglinga/>)

- Corporal (physical) punishment is prohibited. You can ask for advice and help from a social worker with ways of bringing up children that are recognized in Iceland.
- According to Icelandic law, female genital mutilation is strictly prohibited, regardless of whether it is carried out in Iceland or abroad. The sentence it carries can be up to 16 years in prison. Both the attempted crime, as well as the participation in such an act, is also punishable. The Law is applicable to all Icelandic citizens, as well as those residing in Iceland, at the time of the crime.
- Children may not be married in Iceland. Any marriage certificate that shows that one or both persons in a marriage were under the age of 18 at the time of the marriage is not accepted as valid in Iceland.

For more information about children's rights in Iceland, see:

- <https://www.barn.is/born-og-unglingar/rettindi-barna-og-unglinga/>
- <https://www.island.is/born>

## Preschool

- Preschool (kindergarten) is the first stage of the school system in Iceland and is for children aged 6 and younger. Preschools follow a special programme (National Curriculum Guide).
- Preschool is not compulsory in Iceland, but about 96% of children aged 3-5 attend preschool.
- Preschool staff are professionals who are trained to teach, educate, and care for children. A lot of effort is put into making them feel good and developing their talents to the maximum, according to each one needs.
- Children in preschool learn by playing and making things. These activities lay the basis for their education in the next level of school. Children who have been through preschool are better

prepared for learning in junior (compulsory) school. This is particularly true in the case of children who do not grow up speaking Icelandic at home: they learn it in preschool.

- Preschool activities give children whose mother tongue (first language) is not Icelandic a good grounding in Icelandic. At the same time, the parents are encouraged to support the child's first-language skills and learning in various ways.
- Preschools try, as far as they can, to ensure that important information is presented in other languages for the children and their parents.
- Parents must register their children for preschool places. You do this on the on-line (computer) systems of the municipalities (local authorities; for example, Reykjavík, Kópavogur). For this, you must have an electronic ID.
- The municipalities subsidise (pay a large part of the cost of) preschools, but preschools are not completely free of charge. The cost for each month is slightly different from one place to another. Parents who are single, or are studying or who have more than one child attending preschool, pay a smaller charge.
- Children in preschool play outside on most days, so it is important that they have proper clothing according to the weather (cold wind, snow, rain or sun). <http://morsmal.no/no/foreldre-norsk/2382-kle-barna-riktig-i-vinterkulda>
- Parents stay with their children at preschool on the first few days to help them to get used to it. There, the parents are given all the most important information.
- For more about preschools in several languages, see the Reykjavík City website: <https://mml.reykjavik.is/2019/08/30/baeklingar-fyrir-foreldra-leikskolabarna-brouchures-for-parents/>

### **Junior school (*grunnskóli*; compulsory school, up to age 16)**

- By law, all children in Iceland aged 6-16 must go to school.
- All schools work according to the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools, which is set by the Althingi (parliament). All children have an equal right to attend school, and the staff try to make them feel well at school and make progress with their school work.
- All junior schools follow a special programme to help children adapt (fit in) at school if they do not speak Icelandic at home.
- Children whose home language is not Icelandic have the right to be taught Icelandic as their second language. Their parents are also encouraged to help them learn their own home languages in various ways.
- The junior schools try, as far as they can, to ensure that information that is important for contact between teachers and parents is translated.
- Parents must register their children for junior school and after-school activities You do this on the on-line (computer) systems of the municipalities (local authorities; for example, Reykjavík, Kópavogur). For this, you must have an electronic ID.
- Junior school in Iceland is free of charge.

- Most children go to the local junior school in their area. They are grouped in classes by age, not by ability.
- Parents have a duty to tell the school if a child is ill or has to miss school for other reasons. You must ask the head teachers, in writing, for permission for your child not to attend school for any reason.
- <https://mml.reykjavik.is/bruarsmidi/>

### **Junior school, after-school facilities and social centres**

- Sports and swimming are compulsory for all children in Icelandic junior schools. Normally, boys and girls are together in these lessons.
- Pupils (children) in Icelandic junior schools go outside twice a day for short breaks so it is important for them to have proper clothes for the weather.
- It is important for children to bring healthy snack food to school with them. Sweets are not permitted in junior school. They should bring water to drink (not fruit juice). In most schools, children can have hot meals at lunch time. Parents must pay a small charge for these meals.
- In many municipal areas, pupils can have help with their homework, either in school or in the local library.
- Most schools have after-school facilities (*frístundaheimili*) offering organised leisure activities for children aged 6-9 after school hours; you must pay a small charge for this. The children have a chance to talk to each other, make friends and learn Icelandic by playing together with others.
- In most areas, either in the schools or close to them, there are social centres (*félagsmiðstöðvar*) offering social activities for children aged 10-16. These are designed to involve them in positive social interaction. Some centres are open in the late afternoon and evening; others in school breaktime or the lunch break in school.

### **Schools in Iceland – traditions and customs**

Junior schools have school councils, pupils' councils and parents' associations to look after pupils' interests.

- Some special events take place during the year: parties and trips that are organised by the school, the pupils' council, the class representatives or the parents' association. These events are advertised specially.
- It is important that you and the school communicate and work together. You will meet the teachers twice each year to talk about your children and how they are doing in school. You should feel free to contact the school more often if you want to.
- It is important that you (the parents) come to class parties with your children to give them attention and support, see your child in the school environment, see what goes on in the school and meet your children's classmates and their parents.

- It is common that the parents of children who play together also have a lot of contact with each other.
- Birthday parties are important social events for children in Iceland. Children who have birthdays close together often share a party so as to be able to invite more guests. Sometimes they invite only girls, or only boys, or the whole class, and it is important not to leave anyone out. Parents often make an agreement about how much presents should cost.
- Children in junior schools do not normally wear school uniforms.

### **Sports, arts and leisure activities**

It is considered important that children take part in leisure activities (outside school hours): sports, arts and games. These activities play a valuable part in preventive measures. You are urged to support and help your children to take an active part with other children in these organised activities. It is important to find out about the activities on offer in your area. If you find the right activity for your children, this will help them to make friends and give them a chance to get used to speaking Icelandic. Most municipalities give grants (money payments) to make it possible for children to follow leisure activities.

- The main aim of the grants is to make it possible for all children and young people (aged 6-18) to take part in positive after-school activities no matter what sort of homes they come from and whether their parents are rich or poor.
- The grants are not the same in all municipalities (towns) but are ISK 35,000 – 50,000 per year per child.
- Grants are paid electronically (online), directly to the sports or leisure club involved.
- In most municipalities, you must register in the local online system (e.g. *Rafræn Reykjavík*, *Mitt Reykjanes* or *Mínar síður* in Hafnarfjörður) to be able to register your children for school, preschool, leisure activities, etc. For this, you will need an electronic ID (*rafræn skilríki*).

### **Upper secondary school (*framhaldsskóli*)**

- Upper secondary school prepares pupils for going out to work or going on with further studies. [Framhaldsskólar á landinu](#)
- Upper secondary school is not compulsory but those who have completed junior (compulsory) school and passed the junior school examination or equivalent, or have turned 16, can begin upper secondary school. [Innritun í framhaldsskóla](#)
- For more information, see: <https://www.island.is/framhaldsskolar>

## Rules on children out of doors

The law in Iceland says how long children aged 0-16 may be outside in the evenings without adult supervision. These rules are intended to ensure that children will grow up in a safe and healthy environment with sufficient sleep.

Parents let's work together!

Outdoor hours for children During the school period  
(From 1st September until 1st May)

Children, 12 years old or younger, may not be  
outside their home after 20:00 pm.

Children, 13 to 16 years of age, may not be outside  
their home after 22:00 pm. During the summer  
(From 1st May until 1st September)

Children, 12 years old or younger, may not be  
outside their home after 22:00 pm.

Children, 13 to 16 years of age, may not be outside  
their home after 24:00 pm.

[www.samanhopurinn.is](http://www.samanhopurinn.is)



**SAMAN**  
www.samanhopurinn.is

### FORELDRAR VERUM SAMTAKA!

Foreldrum er heimilt að stytta þennan tíma en ekki lengja. Bregða má út af reglu-  
num þegar börn eru í fylgd með fullorðnum og börn 13-16 ára eru á heimleið frá  
viðurkennri skóla,- íþróttá- eða æskulýðssamkomu. Aldur miðast við fæðingarár.

Parents and caregivers have absolute rights to reduce these outdoor hours. These rules are in accordance with the Icelandic Child Protection laws and forbid children to be in public places after the stated hours without adult supervision. These rules can be exempted if children 13 to 16 years of age are on their way home from an official school, sports, or youth centre's activity. The child's birth year rather than its birthday applies.

## **Municipal social services. Help for children**

- There are educational counsellors, psychologists and speech therapists at the Municipal School Service who can help with advice and other services for parents of children in preschool and junior (compulsory) school.
- Staff (social workers) at your local Social Services (*félagsþjónusta*) are there to give advice on financial (money) problems, drug abuse, caring for children, illnesses, questions of access between children and parents where the parents are divorced and other problems.
- You can apply to the Social Services for special financial assistance to help with paying preschool fees (costs), paying for school meals, after-school activity centres (*frístundaheimili*), summer camps or sports and leisure activities. The amounts of money available are not the same in all areas.
- You must remember that all applications are considered separately and each municipality has its own rules that must be followed when grants are paid.

## **Child benefit**

- Child benefit is an allowance (money payment) from the tax authorities to parents (or single/divorced parents) for the children registered as living with them.
- Child benefit is income-related. This means that if you have low wages, you will receive higher benefit payments; if you earn more money, the benefit amount will be smaller.
- Child benefit is paid out on 1 February, 1 May, 1 June and 1 October.
- After a child is born, or moves its legal domicile (*lögheimili*) to Iceland, it can take up to a year or more before the parents will be paid child benefit. Payments begin in the year following the birth or move; but they are based on the *proportion* of the reference year remaining. Example: for a child born in the middle of a year, benefit will be paid – in the following year – at about 50% of the full rate; if the birth is earlier in the year, the proportion will be greater; if it is later, it will be smaller. Full benefit, at 100%, will be paid in the third year only.
- Refugees can apply for extra payments from Social Services to cover make up the full amount. You must remember that all applications are considered separately and each municipality has its own rules that must be followed when benefit payments are made.

## **The Social Insurance Administration (TR) and payments for children**

**Child support (*meðlag*)** is a monthly payment made by one parent to another, for the care of a child, when they do not live together (or after divorce). The child is registered as living with one parent; the other parent pays. These payments are, legally, the property of the child and are to be used for his or her support. You can request that the Social Insurance Administration (*Tryggingastofnun ríkisins*, TR) collect the payments and pay them to you.

- You must submit the child's birth certificate.

**Child pension** is a monthly payment from the Social Insurance Administration (TR) when one of the child's parents is dead or is receiving old-age pension, disability benefit or rehabilitation pension.

- A certificate, or report, from the UN Refugee agency (UNHCR) or the Immigration Agency must be submitted to verify the parent's death or other situation.

**Mother's or father's allowance.** These are monthly payments from TR to single parents who have two or more children legally domiciled with them.

**The Social Insurance Administration (Tryggingastofnun, TR):** <https://www.tr.is/>

- Applications: you apply through My pages (*mínar síður*) on the TR website: <https://innskraning.island.is/?id=minarsidur.tr.is>
- Application forms are at: <https://www.tr.is/tryggingastofnun/umsoknir>
- For information about TR, in English: <https://www.tr.is/en>

### Useful information

- [Umboðsmaður barna](#) (The Children's Ombudsman) works to ensure that children's rights and interests are respected. Anyone can apply to the Children's Ombudsman, and questions from children themselves always receive priority.

Tel.: 522-8999

Children's phone line – free of charge: 800-5999

E-mail: [ub@barn.is](mailto:ub@barn.is)

- [Við og börnin okkar](#) – Our children and us – Information for families in Iceland (in Icelandic and English).