

May 2020



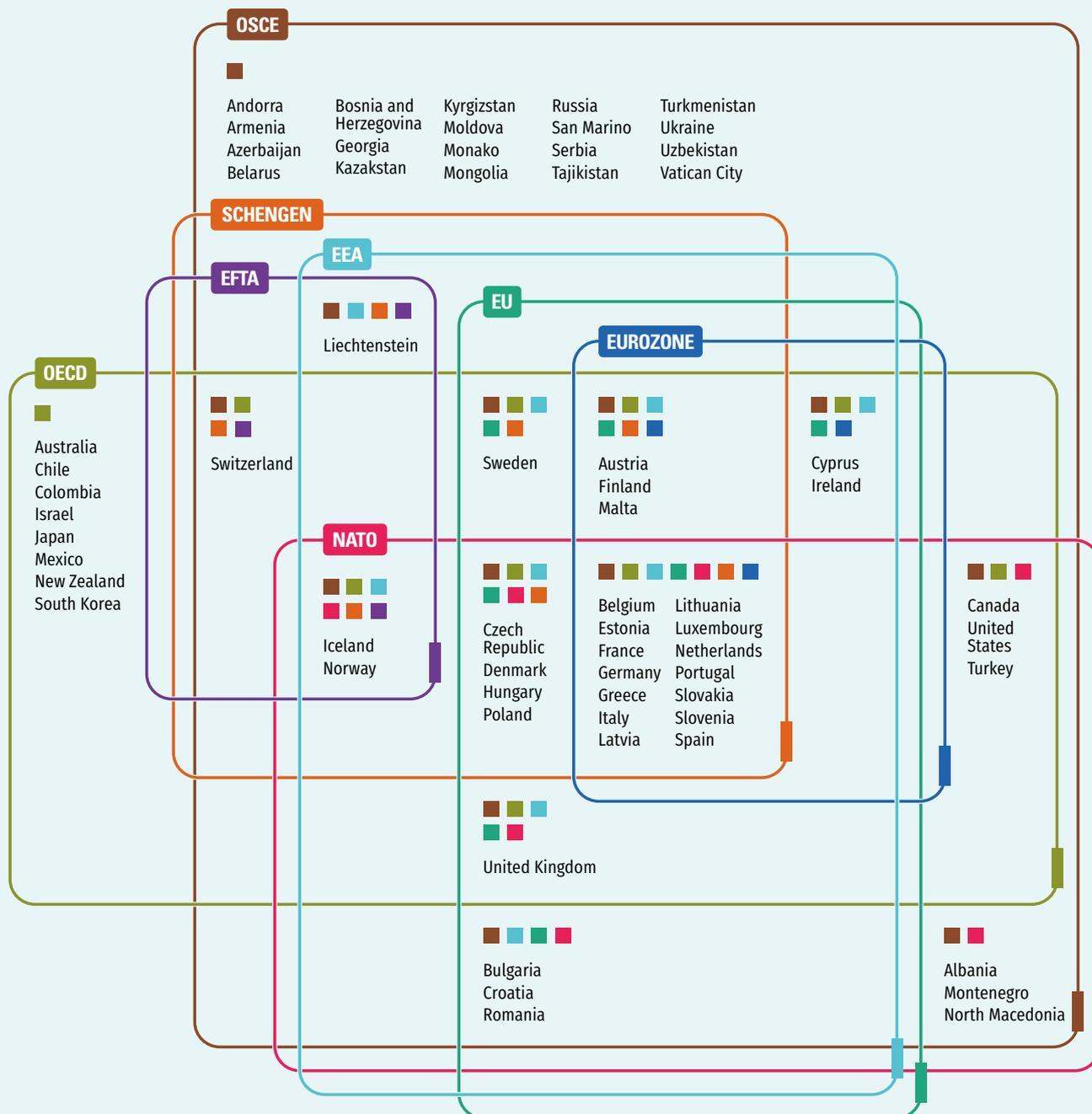
Foreign affairs

Excerpt from the Report
of the Minister for Foreign
Affairs and International
Development Cooperation
to the Parliament 2020

Government of Iceland
Ministry for Foreign Affairs



Layers of International cooperation



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Photos: Ministry for Foreign Affairs (5,15) Sigurjón Ragnar (6,9) Jouni Porsanger (8) NATO (11) Pontus hook (13)

Anniversary in the midst of a pandemic



The Ministry for Foreign Affairs celebrated its 80th anniversary on 10 April, in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic. These have rightfully been called unprecedented times, as the world is confronted with a global health crisis and what could possibly turn out to be the most severe economic downturn in our times. A lot has changed since the Icelandic Foreign service was established 80 years ago, but its main role remains unchanged: to protect and promote Iceland's interests abroad.

The importance of this role has rarely been as visible as in the last few weeks, where the staff of Iceland's diplomatic missions around the world and at the Ministry have worked tirelessly in assisting around 12 thousand Icelanders travelling abroad as the pandemic broke out.

Iceland's membership in the UN Human Rights Council from 2018-2019 has been one of the most significant roles Iceland has undertaken on the international scene. Iceland's initiatives on the Council even received global attention, not least when the Council passed a resolution tabled by Iceland on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines and when Iceland lead a Joint Statement, on behalf of almost forty states, on development in Saudi Arabia. To a certain extent, our leading role on the Council was a touchstone for how the (relatively small) Icelandic Foreign Service would cope with such an extensive and challenging task. However, it should be safe to say that the Foreign Service passed the test with flying colours.

Last year, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, presented for the first time a special report to Althingi on the status and implementation of the European Economic Area Agreement. The EEA agreement has transformed the Icelandic business environment in the 25 years since its ratification, and the presentation of a special report underlines its importance. The Foreign Ministry has at the same time placed an increased emphasis on fostering an even closer

relationship with the United States, Iceland's largest export market. Protecting Iceland's interests following Brexit has also been a priority in the Ministry and the negotiations with the UK on the future relationship between the countries will soon be under way.

Iceland's NATO membership and the bilateral defence agreement with the US remain key pillars of Icelandic foreign policy. Changes in the security landscape in Europe demand an increased preparedness in the region, which is the reason for the sizeable maintenance and construction work of defence-related properties within the security area at Keflavík Airport.

Iceland assumed its two-year presidency of the Arctic Council in May 2019. The presidency provides an opportunity to highlight the importance of Sustainable Development. Iceland has a great deal of interest in the sustainable and peaceful development in the region. The presidency is an opportunity to highlight Iceland as an active contributor to global affairs.

International development cooperation has become an increasingly important part of the Ministry's work. A year ago, Althingi passed a new policy for international development cooperation. The policy brings Icelandic expertise to the forefront, and how it can contribute to infrastructure development and economic growth in developing states.

*Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson,
minister for foreign affairs and
international development cooperation*

COVID-19: A new focus for the Foreign Service



When the coronavirus pandemic hit the globe in early 2020 the work of the Foreign Service underwent a drastic transformation. The flexibility of the Foreign Service, which has been consciously fostered and strengthened in recent years, proved invaluable when about half of the staff took part in assisting around twelve thousand Icelanders abroad.

As everywhere else in society, daily tasks changed overnight and extensive plans for visits, events and conferences had to be revised immediately. The Foreign Service, along with Promote Iceland, has done its utmost to assist Icelandic export companies to find their footing in a drastically changed environment and continues to chart any barriers and to resolve them to the furthest extent possible.

Negotiations in record speed

Globally, there has been fierce competition for protective gear, respirators and other necessary medical supplies. The Foreign Service has done

its utmost to facilitate the import of these products. The Embassy of Iceland in China has worked hard to facilitate and expedite the purchase and transportation of products from China and the Government has been in good cooperation with Japanese authorities in the response to the pandemic. In a concerted effort by the whole administration, Iceland was able to join the JPA on the joint procurement of medical products in Brussels in record time and to avert a ban by the European Union on the export of certain protective gear for medical professionals.

Consular Services during the pandemic: location of Icelanders and repatriation flights



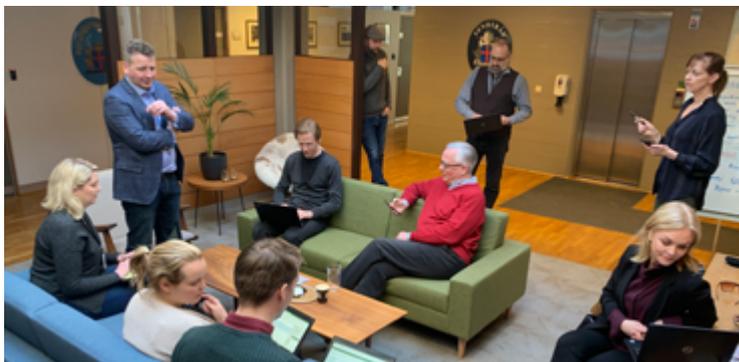
Coronavirus pandemic
Consular Services 14 March to 29 April 2020



Nordic and international cooperation

When the coronavirus started to spread outside of Asia, the international community fumbled in its initial response, not least within the Schengen area where borders closed suddenly and without warning. Soon, most states concluded that safeguarding international cooperation and institutions such as the World Health Organization would be the only way forward.

Nordic cooperation has proven its value over the past few weeks, epitomized by the close collaboration between the Nordic consular services. The Nordic countries have stressed the importance of protecting and promoting human rights and democracy, which have come under threat during the pandemic, and supporting low-income countries through international institutions and humanitarian organizations. Iceland has already announced a comprehensive package of 276 million Icelandic króna (ISK) as a first response to the fight against COVID-19 in developing countries, a contribution that will be channelled through international organizations, humanitarian organizations and specific projects in bilateral partner countries.



14. mars 2020. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation and his staff coordinate the tasks ahead.

MFA NEWS

Medical equipment from China

7 April 2020 Icelandic health authorities contracted Icelandair to transport protective gear and medical equipment from China. The order was placed a while ago when the seriousness of the virus was becoming evident. The embassy of Iceland in China, in cooperation with authorities in Iceland prepared the procurement of this equipment and helped to secure the necessary permits for exports. The embassy of China in Reykjavik was also of great assistance in this project.

Tasks carried out around the clock

26 March 2020 The Consular Affairs Unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs safeguards the interest and safety of Icelandic citizens abroad and is of the main pillars of the Icelandic Foreign Service. The Unit carries out tasks around the clock in Reykjavik, and Diplomatic Missions in three continents.

Icelandic family returns home from Wuhan

21 February 2020 The Consular Affairs Unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Diplomatic Missions in Beijing and Paris, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Chief Epidemiologist, and the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management worked in a concerted action to bring an Icelandic family home from Wuhan today. Wide-ranging travel restrictions from Wuhan were in place but through the European Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), where Iceland is a Participating State, it was possible to arrange seats for the family in a repatriation flight to Paris, organized for European Citizens in the area.

Iceland and external trade



Free trade is the foundation of prosperity in Iceland and one of the main pillars of Iceland’s foreign policy. The EEA Agreement, along with a network of trade agreements, opens up markets to Icelandic companies. The collaboration with the business sector has increased significantly, not least through the reform of the Promote Iceland agency. Preparations for the future negotiations with the UK following Brexit remain a priority.

Iceland’s free trade network expands

Fifty years have passed since Iceland became a member of European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The EFTA free trade area now covers 40 states and territories outside of the EU. Iceland has ratified a free trade agreement with Indonesia but the entry into force is pending. Work is under way to establish a date for the signing of a free trade agreement with MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay).

Free trade negotiations with India, Malaysia and Vietnam are ongoing. In the last quarter of 2019, the Faroese authorities withdrew their termination of the Hoyvík Agreement on free trade between Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

The first trade dialogue of the foreign ministers of Iceland and the United States of America was held in Reykjavík in June 2019. In September the Foreign Minister of Iceland and the Vice-President of the United States hosted a business round table discussion in Reykjavik. In November 2019 the Foreign Minister met with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, along with a large business delegation of representatives from Icelandic companies.

Trade agreements

74 

Free trade agreements with 74 countries and economies, including three awaiting ratification.

115 

Air travel agreements and memoranda of understanding granting flight authorisations.

10 

Iceland has made investment agreements with 10 countries as well as other agreements that include investment provisions.

44 

Double taxation treaties with 44 countries have been implemented, including the 2018 agreement with Japan.



From the panel discussion on Icelandic-American trade in September 2019. Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson and Mike Pence, Vice-President of the United States led the delegations.

Comprehensive discussions with the United Kingdom

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 31 January will considerably impact the relations of Iceland and the UK as they have been based on the EEA Agreement for the past 25 years. Until the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020, the UK is fully bound by EU law, including international agreements such as the EEA Agreement. Discussions on the future relationship with the UK will commence in June of this year. The public policy of British authorities is to finalise the discussions with the EU and other close partner countries such as the EFTA states within the EEA before the end of the transition period.

The discussions on the future relationship with Britain are divided into three main fields



Free Trade Agreements negotiations

12-14 working groups



Agreements outside the scope of Free Trade negotiations

4-8 working groups



Withdrawal agreement and related matters

2-3 working groups

Promote Iceland and increased collaboration with the business sector

The Promote Iceland agency has been strengthened and restructured through legal amendments, which passed in 2018. The aim was to provide the agency with the means to better serve companies in the fields of export, investment and travel services. The work of twelve dedicated business representatives working in eleven of Iceland's diplomatic missions abroad has been integrated into Promote Iceland.

The Cooperation fund of the business sector and the authorities on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

A new partnership fund of the business sector and Icelandic authorities for the advancement of the UN Global Goals is up and running. The fund is intended to support collaborative ventures of companies in developing countries with a special emphasis on the projects which can accelerate progress on UN Global Goal no. 8 on decent employment and sustainable economic growth. The first Icelandic companies working with the authorities via the fund are Marel and Thoregs.

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Signing of Agreement on the UK's withdrawal from the European Economic Area

28 January 2020 The foreign ministers of Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein signed an agreement with the United Kingdom on its withdrawal from the European Economic Area. The agreement ensures i.a. that Icelanders who either reside in the UK or take up residency before the end of the transition period can remain in the UK and that their rights will remain in all major aspects intact. This also applies to British citizens living in Iceland.

The Foreign minister and the Vice-President of the United States led the panel discussions on business

4 September 2019 Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson and Mike Pence, Vice-President of the United States, led panel discussions on business, science and cultural relations between Iceland and the United States with representatives from the business sectors of both countries at a meeting in Hofdi House. The Foreign Minister emphasised the importance of the visit of the Vice-President of the United States as a contribution to increased cooperation between Iceland and the United States.

The foreign ministers of Iceland and Russia discussed the Arctic region and trade

26 November 2019 Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson and Sergei Lavrov, foreign minister of Russia, discussed Arctic matters as well as bilateral relations and trade at their meeting in Moscow today. Security affairs in Europe and international topics were also discussed. Matters regarding the Arctic region were in the spotlight at the meeting.

Together towards a Sustainable Arctic



The Chairmanship of the Arctic Council passed to Iceland for a two-year period at the ministerial meeting of the Council in May 2019. The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation and coordination among the Arctic States, indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues.

The theme of Iceland’s Chairmanship program is “Together towards a Sustainable Arctic”, reflecting Iceland’s commitment to the principle of sustainable development and referring to the necessity of close cooperation between the states and peoples of the region and beyond. During its Chairmanship, Iceland has focused on three priority areas – the Arctic marine environment, climate and green energy solutions, and peoples and communities of the Arctic – as well as further strengthening the work of the Council.

The meeting schedule of the Arctic Council has inevitably been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Icelandic Chairmanship and the Council’s six Working Groups are striving to carry on its important work.

Coinciding with Iceland’s Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation has launched a revision of Iceland’s Arctic Policy and aims to present a draft for a new parliamentary resolution in the next legislative session.



Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson assumes the Chairmanship from Timo Soini, then Foreign Minister of Finland, at the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi in Finland in May 2019.

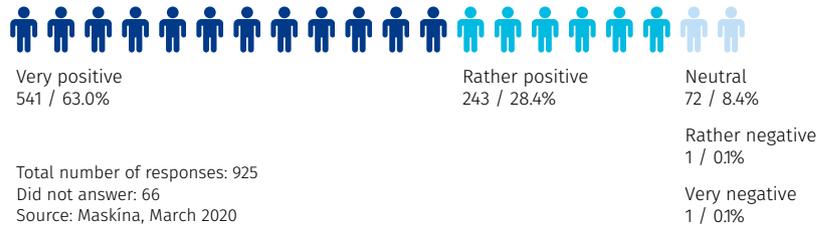
Arctic Council member states

Canada, Finland, Iceland, Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, United States, Russian Federation and Sweden



Survey on Icelanders' opinion on Nordic co-operation

How positive or negative are you towards Iceland taking an active part in Nordic co-operation?



An eventful year in Nordic collaboration

Iceland presided over the cooperation of Nordic foreign ministers (N5) and the foreign ministers of the Nordic countries and the Baltic countries (NB8) in 2019. In the platform of N5 the ministers met three times during the presidency year, i.a. at a summer meeting in Borgarnes in September and twice in the platform of NB8. Iceland also presided over the Nordic Council of Ministers and on the collaboration of Nordic prime ministers. In total around 30 Nordic ministerial meetings were held, including the meetings of ministers in particular fields in 2019. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation attended 13 additional bilateral meetings with Nordic foreign ministers.



From the Borgarnes meeting of the Nordic and Baltic foreign ministers in September 2019.

One of the major issues resolved at the Nordic foreign minister meeting was that Bjorn Bjarnason, appointed by the foreign minister, was tasked with writing a report on the increased collaboration of the Nordic countries in foreign affairs and security matters, inter alia by taking into consideration climate change, cyber threats and the importance of supporting international cooperation and international law. This work is comparable to the Stoltenberg-report of 2009. The report is expected to be ready by mid-year 2020.

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Bjorn Bjarnason, author of a new report on Nordic international- and security co-operation

30 October 2019 Foreign minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson is in Stockholm where he takes part in the Nordic Council Assembly 29-31 October. There was consensus on appointing former minister Bjorn Bjarnason with writing a new report with suggestions as to how to move Nordic collaboration forward.

Iceland assumes the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

7 May 2019 Iceland assumed the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council at a meeting of Council foreign ministers which took place earlier today in Rovaniemi in Finland, where Foreign Minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson took over from his Finnish colleague Timo Soini. At the meeting the work of the Arctic Council in the last two years was reviewed and the foundation laid for the work ahead in the next two years during Iceland's Chairmanship.

The Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council meet for the first time

9 October 2019 The Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council are now convening for the first time. The meeting is a part of the strategy of increasing collaboration between the two Councils and attended by representatives from the member states of the Arctic Council, the Council working groups, permanent delegates of native organizations in the Arctic and representatives of the business community.

Iceland and national security



Respect for international law and active international cooperation is essential for a small state without any military. Iceland ensures its security and defences through its alliance with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the bilateral Defence Agreement of 1951 between Iceland and the United States, as well as with an active participation in the work of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and by cooperating with neighbouring states in the field of security. The National Security Policy guides the work when it comes to active foreign policy, defence and public safety.

Collaboration with NATO

Within NATO, Iceland emphasizes political unity and solidarity when it comes to the enhancement of security, stability and collective defence, at the same time seeking ways to reduce tensions and promote mutual trust. Security and readiness in the North Atlantic, arms control and disarmament, along with the active participation of women in the field of security and defence, continue to be a priority. In cooperation with NATO Iceland ensures the operation of the Iceland Air Defence and Surveillance system (IADS), NATO Control and Reporting Centre and other defence infrastructure in Iceland.

Defence projects in Iceland

In line with security developments in Europe the temporary presence of US and allied forces in Iceland has increased in the past few years, mainly due to antisubmarine surveillance, air policing missions and defence exercises. In line with the defence commitments of Iceland and the National Security Policy of Iceland, necessary upgrades and maintenance has been undertaken at Keflavik Air Base, along with new construction to support the increased presence of allied forces. The work is financed by Iceland, the United States and NATO's Support and Procurement Agency.

Iceland's participation in defence exercises

Iceland plans to continue its participation in the planning process and implementation of large-scale defence exercises in and around Iceland. Due to changes in the security environment in the Arctic region, defence exercises have increased in scale. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the bilateral defence exercise, Northern Viking, had to be cancelled last April but the NATO antisubmarine exercise, Dynamic Mongoose, will take place at the beginning of June as scheduled. The aim is to conduct both Northern Viking and Dynamic Mongoose every other year in the future.

Arms control and disarmament

There is an increased global focus on disarmament and arms control, in which Iceland actively participates. There is great uncertainty and growing concern for the future of arms control and disarmament agreements. With rapid technological developments, new threats and challenges have emerged, as well as challenges arising from the COVID-19 health pandemic.



Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, visited Iceland in June 2019. Here he is pictured with Anna Jóhannsdóttir, then permanent secretary of Iceland at NATO and US Navy Air Patrol Squadron Commander Hamish Kirkland. The submarine surveillance aircraft is of the type P-8A Poseidon.

Iceland Crisis Response Unit

Last year, 13 civilian experts were deployed by the Iceland Crisis Response Unit. Six women and seven men, inter alia in Georgia, Afghanistan and in NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Estonia and Lithuania. This year a civilian expert will also be deployed at NATO’s eFP mission in Latvia. In addition to civilian experts in the field, Iceland also provides experts to NATO in Belgium, Britain, and the United States. Besides contributing experts to NATO, the experts through their work raise the profile of Icelandic interests in NATO’s planning processes and operations. Last year Iceland’s participation in NATO’s operation in Afghanistan came to an end after 17 years of continued presence of personnel in Afghanistan.

Nordic defence cooperation

The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) has grown and intensified over the past few years and so has Iceland’s bilateral cooperation in security and defence with the UK, Germany and the Baltic countries. In the Nordic context the work takes place in NORDEF where Iceland participates on the civilian side of the work.

Contributions to NATO 2019



Operation of the Icelandic air defence system, which is part of the integrated NATO air defence system.

140



Operation and oversight of 140 NATO defence structures in Iceland.

13



civil experts work around the world on a variety of NATO projects ranging from gender equality to training in bomb disposal.

4,000



Host country support for NATO country personnel. Up to four thousand people stayed at Keflavík Airport in 2019.

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Escalation in the situation in Iraq and Iran among topics at the meeting of Nordic ministers of defence

17 January 2020 The Ministers of Defence meet twice a year in the context of NORDEF, which is a key cooperation forum in the Nordic region for security and defence. The escalation of the situation in Iraq and Iran was among the topics discussed and there was consensus on prioritising the security of the international forces in Iraq. The international forces have inter alia held training courses in Iraq, which have proven to be an important part of combating the so-called Islamic state terrorist organisation.

The prime minister and the foreign minister attend the meeting of NATO leaders in London

3 December 2019 Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, and Foreign Minister, Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson, attend a NATO Leaders meeting in London commencing today. The Leaders Meeting is held to commemorate the 70 years anniversary of NATO. The main topics of the meeting are the changes in the security environment, anti-terror operations, burden-sharing, and the relationship with Russia.

The Secretary General of NATO visits Iceland

11 June 2019 Security in the North Atlantic, future projects of Iceland in Kosovo, Nordic Defence Cooperation and hybrid threats were among topics discussed at the meeting of the Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, with Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, and Foreign Minister, Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson, during the Secretary General’s visit to Iceland.

Iceland takes a decisive role on the United Nations Human Rights Council



Iceland’s election to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva proved to be one of the most important roles Iceland has taken on within the international fora. This was the first time Iceland took a seat on the Human Rights Council. We are pleased that there was an overall satisfaction with Iceland’s performance during its tenure which showcased the importance of small states’ voices within the Council and also, that smaller countries can also have a decisive impact. In one of many letters of appreciation received by the foreign minister it is stated that through its efforts “Iceland had managed in an impressive manner to secure support from countries all over the world”.

Iceland’s initiatives receive global publicity

Iceland was elected to the Human Rights Council in July 2018 following the resignation of the United States from the Council. During its tenure, Iceland’s priorities were on gender equality and women’s rights, the rights of LGBTI+ people, children’s rights, a more efficient and effective Human Rights Council and the important link between human rights and environmental issues, including climate change. From the onset there was a clear determination to make Iceland’s voice heard clearly within the Council. In fact, Iceland garnered widespread attention when it led a joint statement on behalf of 36 countries calling on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to improve the situation of human rights in the country. The statement marked a turning point as it was the first time that Saudi Arabia was subject to such collective criticism in the Council. Iceland also tabled a resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines, expressing concern over allegations of human rights violations in the Philippines, which was passed by the Council.

Gender equality as a key priority

Gender equality and women’s rights were a key priority during Iceland’s term. The participation of the Prime Minister of Iceland in the Council’s June session 2019 underlined the Government’s importance on these issues. Iceland’s emphasis on gender equality at the Council culminated in a first-time resolution on Equal Pay presented by Iceland.

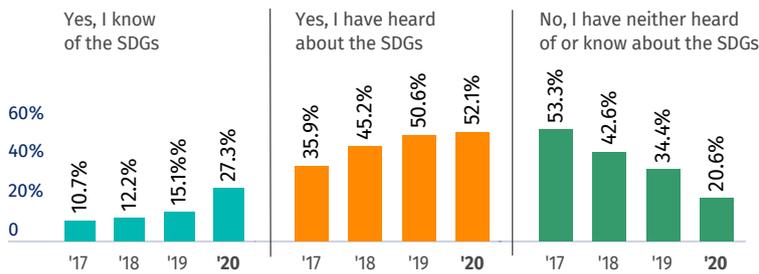


A special report was published on Iceland’s participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council in February of this year. With this report, the intention was to underline that our efforts on the Human Rights Council were made with full transparency and in close cooperation with the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Althingi and the Government’s Steering Group on Human Rights.

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations

The United Nations celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. This milestone is an opportunity to look back to the past as well as to the future, to remember the successful efforts in the fields of human rights, peace and security, sustainable development, and to open up discussions on ways of meeting new challenges. The commemoration of the 75th anniversary was agreed through intergovernmental consultations led by Iceland and Singapore.

Awareness among the general public of the Sustainable Development Goals



The United Nations remain central in Iceland’s foreign policy. Last year, Icelandic authorities presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations on the status of Iceland’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is responsible for the implementation of goals related to international affairs and development cooperation.



| The Icelandic delegation at the 74th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Negotiations with FAO and IFAD

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs signed a formal agreement last year with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) for supporting the campaign against illegal fishing and on technical assistance on oceanic matters. Formal cooperation was also initiated with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for utilizing Icelandic know-how, in regards to the blue economy. Both institutions have their headquarters in Rome.

MFA NEWS

Iceland and UNESCO sign a framework agreement on development cooperation

26 April 2019 Iceland and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have signed a cooperation agreement in the field of development cooperation. The framework agreement is the first of its kind between Iceland and UNESCO for development cooperation. On the one hand, Iceland contributes to a UNESCO project aiming at strengthening the capacity of poor countries to implement reform in the field of education. On the other hand, the support aims at guarding the freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in developing countries.

The Foreign minister visits Sierra Leone

9 October 2019 Foreign minister Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson is in Sierra Leone for a working visit where he is studying the development cooperation projects of Iceland in the country in the fields of fishing and equality issues as well as meeting with leaders to discuss the development cooperation of the countries. The minister commenced his journey by visiting a primary school where Iceland has supported a health-care project for menstruating teenage girls, aimed at reducing girl drop-out rates.

Adoption of Iceland’s resolution on the human rights situation in the Philippines

11 July 2019 Today the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution presented by Iceland in the Council on the status of human rights in the Philippines. 18 states supported the resolution, 15 abstained and 14 opposed the resolution. This is the first time Iceland takes the initiative in this manner in the Council and the first time a resolution is adopted by the Council on the status of human rights in the Philippines.

New Policy for International Development Cooperation



Iceland adopted a new policy for International Development Cooperation in May 2019. The overarching goal of the policy is to reduce poverty, hunger, and to promote well-being on the basis of human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development. The policy supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Malawi and Uganda are bilateral partner countries. In both countries, Iceland works in partnership with specific district authorities as well as key UN organizations. Regional cooperation has a wider scope and includes projects in seven countries in East Africa focusing on the use of geothermal energy, along with two countries in West-Africa, Sierra Leone and Liberia, where projects focus on fisheries and gender equality. Regional cooperation is implemented in partnership with local actors and international organisations. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation visited Sierra Leone last year.

Iceland's main partner organizations are: The World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The demand for humanitarian assistance continues to rise, exacerbated by

armed conflict, climate change and poverty. In the field of humanitarian assistance and emergency response, support and collaboration are channelled through key UN organizations. Furthermore, Iceland has an active partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and makes continued contributions to projects implemented by civil society organizations in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

GRÓ – Capacity Development

In January, the former UN University training programmes on Gender Equality, Geothermal, Land Restoration and Fisheries were joined together under a new centre, GRÓ – International Centre for Capacity Development, in partnership with UNESCO. The Centre is the first multidisciplinary Category 2 Centre in UNESCO's network and is as such closely linked to UNESCO's mandate.

Multilateral development cooperation 2019



A contribution of ISK 777 million to several institutions for emergency and humanitarian assistance.



Iceland currently leads the coordination effort among the Nordic-Baltic constituency, a faction of 8 states, at the World Bank.



43,500 people in Northern-Uganda benefit from a partnership with UNICEF strengthening the nexus of humanitarian and development initiatives.



194 states contribute to the Green Climate Fund. In 2019 Iceland doubled its contribution.

Bilateral development cooperation 2019



13,000 homes in the township of Mangochi in Malawi received new toilet facilities.



40,000 people in Sierra Leone gained access to clean water.



88 A contribution of ISK 88 million to the district level programme based approaches in Malawi and Uganda due to COVID-19.



2,000 female workers enjoy the benefits of improved conditions at fish markets in Uganda.



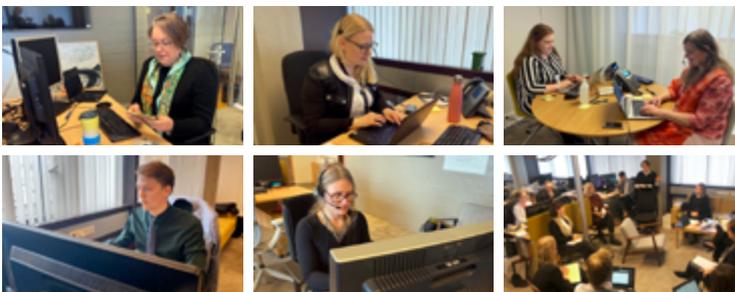
81,000 people gained access to improved maternity services in the township of Mangochi in Malawi.

Greetings from the Consular Services

As the coronavirus pandemic was forcing borders to close and disrupting international passenger flights, the Icelandic Foreign Service was working around the clock to assist Icelanders abroad in finding their way home. The situation had become quite complex for some people, but thankfully we were able to solve many of the problems they were facing. Our diplomatic missions gathered information on travel restrictions and available routes to provide people with the travel advice they needed.

The Consular Services' inbox has a special folder titled *Love and Romance*, dedicated to distanced loved ones trying to reunite at a time when normal flight routes were largely disrupted. Reuniting lovers was an especially rewarding task for us!

We are thankful for the fact that 12 thousand individuals registered with the Consular Services giving us a clearer picture of the challenge we were facing. We called many of those people to check whether they still needed our assistance. While sometimes surprised by the call, most were happy to hear from us. The letters of appreciation we received further motivated us to continue our work.



Now, when most of those who wanted to return to Iceland have landed safely, the Consular Services return to normal. Therefore, we remind you to renew your passports so you will be ready to go when travel restrictions are lifted. Our diplomatic missions and consuls are always at your service - but thinking ahead always pays off.

*Kind regards,
the Consular Services*

GRATITUDE

Each group of returning travellers was celebrated by the Consular Services team like a goal in a sporting match, emotions running high and completed checklists enthusiastically torn down from the drawing boards. It is a good feeling to be able help people out of demanding circumstances which have put all parties in question to the test.

"I've probably been in more contact with the Foreign Ministry than anyone else for the past seven days. They've been incredibly helpful, and I know that they are working on some sort of a solution for me and at least 30 other Icelanders that are stranded here." Söldís Alda Óskarsdóttir, a traveller in Bali, told mbl.is

"I'm thankful for this adventure, the help and the unity I have felt throughout this whole process." An unnamed traveller said as he came home from South America.

"AFS in Iceland would like to express its appreciation to the Foreign Ministry for their invaluable help and good cooperation over the past few weeks. Professionalism and problem solving has been the connecting theme throughout," the international youth exchange organization AFS wrote on Facebook.

"When I told my [foreign] in-laws that you had called to check up on me, they were speechless. I am very thankful for being an Icelander in these times," an unnamed traveller wrote to the Foreign Ministry.

Foreign affairs

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