

# **Plan of Action on Gender Equality Regarding Wages**

**April 2013**



**VELFERÐARRÁÐUNEYTIÐ**

Ministry of Welfare: Plan of Action on Gender Equality Regarding Wages  
April 2013

Publisher: Ministry of Welfare  
Hafnarhúsinu við Tryggvagötu  
150 Reykjavík  
Tel: 545 8100  
Fax: 551 9165  
E-mail: [postur@vel.is](mailto:postur@vel.is)  
Url: [velferdarraduneyti.is](http://velferdarraduneyti.is)

Setup and format: Ministry of Welfare

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ISBN 978-9979-799-69-6

# Index

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Introduction .....	3
1 General measures.....	5
1.1 Collaboration between parties on measures and studies of gender-based wage differentials	5
1.2 Wage equality certification .....	6
1.3 Awareness-raising.....	7
1.4 The social framework.....	8
1.4.1 Maternity and paternity leave.....	8
1.4.2 Measures against gender divisions on the labour market.....	9
1.4.3 Integration of family and working life.....	9
1.4.4 Larger proportions of women in senior management of enterprises.....	10
2 Measures regarding the public sector .....	11
2.1 Registration in Orri and the ÍSTARF-classification system.....	11
2.2 Wage equality surveys .....	11
2.3 Guidelines for directors and managers of institutions regarding criteria for wage reviews ....	12
2.4 Job evaluation .....	12
3 Monitoring.....	14

## **Introduction**

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This Plan of Action on Gender Equality Regarding Wages is for four years, i.e. until the end of 2016. The aim is that by that time, the gender-based wage differentials that exist on the Icelandic labour market shall have been reduced considerably. For this to be realistic it is important that all players on the domestic labour market shoulder their responsibilities and ensure that men and women working for the same employer receive equal wages and enjoy the same terms for carrying out the same, or comparable, jobs.

### **Principal tasks to be addressed by the Government as the party responsible for equality issues**

- To establish a task force to function as the forum for consultation and collaboration between the Government and the organisations of the social partners on gender equality regarding wages. Functions of the task force are to include coordination of wage surveys, preparation of the introduction of a wage equality standard and the provision of information and counselling on equality issues regarding wages for institutions and enterprises (companies). A project manager is to work with the task force to ensure that these tasks are carried out.
- To launch an experimental project on the introduction of a wage equality standard, including the establishment of a consultative forum, with participation of enterprises and institutions that are interested in adopting the standard. Consultancy services and access to expertise should also be offered.
- To promote studies of maternity/paternity leave. It is important to find out why some parents do not use their full entitlement to maternity/paternity leave and to examine the effects of maternity/paternity leave on the division of roles and responsibilities in the home, the bridging of the period between the end of maternity/paternity leave and accession by children to places in day care and the position of parents on the labour market when maternity/paternity leave is at an end. Studies show that the different extent to which the sexes make use of maternity/paternity leave may influence their wage differentials.
- To stimulate discussion on wage equality and to establish an information source regarding wage equality, bringing together in one place all information and materials regarding gender-based wage differentials.
- To increase the supply of awareness-raising and educational materials for employers and persons active on the labour market concerning ways of facilitating the integration of family and professional life.
- To draw up a programme of measures to reduce gender divisions in the choice of education and careers.

### **Principal tasks to be addressed by the Government as an employer**

- To initiate work on improvements in registration in Orri, the state's information and human resources database. Improved registration would make it possible to carry out more comprehensive and more reliable analysis of wage payments among civil servants.
- To carry out annual wage-equality surveys in all government institutions, including the ministries, so as to make available an assessment of gender-based wage differentials, both between and within institutions.
- To prepare directions for the heads of government institutions on how to respond if wage surveys reveal the existence of gender-based wage differentials.
- To collaborate with the organisations of the social partners on having regular surveys made of gender-based wage differentials in both the public and the private sector.

- This should make it possible to obtain important information on the situation regarding gender-based wage differentials and to assess the results of measures taken.
- To work, in collaboration with the organisations of the social partners, on the definition of explanatory variables that may be regarded as relevant regarding gender-based wage differentials.
- To take steps to examine the structure of collective agreements in the private sector with a view to assessing to what extent gender-based wage differentials may be attributed to systemic factors.
- To encourage studies of the criteria and procedures used in the municipalities' job-assessment system in order to assess whether traditional women's jobs are underrated as compared with men's jobs that are of equal worth.

# **1 General measures**

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## **1.1 Collaboration between parties on measures and studies of gender-based wage differentials**

In order for it to be possible to make purposeful suggestions on measures to eliminate gender-based wage differentials and to assess the results of measures taken, it is important to have available a quantification of gender-based wage differentials and to identify their causes.

For a long time now, when gender-based wage differentials have been examined, an attempt has been made to arrive at a single correct figure that will pin down the actual degree of wage discrimination between the sexes. A demand of this type is in many ways unrealistic, because the different methods used, and the premises on which each study is based, may influence the outcome. It is important that the government and the organisations of the social partners agree on a means of measuring gender-based wage differentials, i.e. both as regards the method to be adopted for the measurement and also what explanatory variables that influence wages are to be admitted as relevant. Various explanatory variables are used in studies of gender-based wage differentials, and it is sometimes considered that inordinate weight is attached to them. Generally speaking, however, it is considered that when comparing comparable groups of women and men, it is necessary to take into account important explanatory variables such as the nature of the work, qualifications, length of employment and working hours.

In connection with the collective agreements between the social partners in February 2008, an agreement was signed between the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and Statistics Iceland on a study of gender-based wage differentials in the private sector in the period 2000-2007. The aim of this study was to throw light on the principal methods used and explanatory variables proposed as theoretical explanations of gender-based wage differentials, to discuss the pros and cons of the databases available at Statistics Iceland and to lay down a methodological basis for calculating gender-based wage differentials. This study by Statistics Iceland was based on longitudinal data, i.e. repeated records of the same individuals over a long period, which make it possible to assess the effect of undetected, and even undetectable, factors. Data sets of this type are rich sources of information and make it possible to carry out more sensitive analyses of gender-based wage differentials. The fact that recording is repeated at regular intervals and using the same methodology should also have greater evidential value than when many studies are made based on different methodologies.

The Minister of Welfare is to appoint, formally, a task force on gender equality as regards wages, consisting of representatives of the government and the organisations of the social partners. The Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and the organisations of the social partners are to have representatives in the task force. The task force is to work on the coordination of wage studies, draw up a schedule for the introduction of a wage equality standard and work on making information and advice on wage equality between the sexes available to institutions and enterprises. It is important to have the studies made by Statistics Iceland cover the labour market as a whole, and not only the private sector as has been the case up to now. The task force is also to be entrusted with discussing explanatory variables and other matters that are seen as natural to include in an analysis of gender-based wage differentials, and in this it should take into account, amongst other things, the work of a task force appointed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs on the same topics. A project manager is to work with the task force to ensure that these tasks are carried out.

## **1.2 Wage equality certification**

The Act No. 10/2008, on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (hereinafter referred to as the Gender Equality Act) and collective agreements place stringent demands on enterprises and institutions on the domestic labour market regarding wage equality between the sexes. In order to meet these demands, it is necessary that enterprises and institutions have a clear vision in human resource matters and that they deliberately develop procedures for decision-making regarding wages. Certification involves having an impartial entity certify that gender-based wage discrimination is not practised in the enterprise or institution in question. The idea behind such certification is that the enterprise or institution involved would acquire a better reputation on the market and would therefore attract the most competent workers after receiving certification of its wage and personnel policy.

Work on the production of a wage equality standard began in 2008 (cf. Interim Provision IV of the Gender Equality Act and the protocol to the Collective Agreement between the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, the Confederation of Icelandic Employers in the Private Sector of February 2008, which stressed the importance of collaboration between the parties on equality issues during the term of the agreement). Negotiations then began in autumn 2008 between representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Insurance, the Icelandic Confederation of Labour and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers on the implementation of the interim provision and the protocol. It was agreed to commission the Icelandic Standards Council to see to the production of a standard on the application of a policy on wage equality and equality of opportunity between the sexes regarding employment and job development which could be used as the basis of certification. A declaration of intent on these matters was signed on 24 October 2008, and work on production of the standard began immediately.

Work on the production of the standard was subject to the rules applying to standards in Europe, by which the Icelandic Standards Council is bound. One aspect of these was that all those who might be interested were invited to participate in the production of the standard. They formed a ‘technical committee’ which oversaw the work and aimed at achieving a consensus on all aspects of the standard. The foundation meeting of the technical committee on a wage equality system was held on 26 November 2008, the following entities participating in the meeting: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Insurance (now the Ministry of Welfare), the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, the Confederation of Icelandic Employers, the Union of Local Authorities, the Centre for Gender Equality, the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, the Association of University Graduates, the Icelandic Women’s Rights Society, the Association of Professional Women and the business consultancy ParX, in addition to a number of self-employed specialists on human resource management. The technical committee soon found that it was not appropriate to address wage equality between the sexes, on the one hand, and issues of equality regarding engagement, termination of employment and access to jobs and professional development, on the other, in one and the same standard, and proposed that it would be better to treat these issues in two separate standards. Up to now, the work of the technical committee has been directed solely towards the production of a standard on wage equality between the sexes.

A draft of the standard was advertised on 19 June 2012, and all interested parties were invited to submit written comments on the standard by 20 September 2012. Thereafter, it was the responsibility of the technical committee to adopt a position on all comments submitted and to mention them in connection with the publication of the standard in its final form in December 2012.

The wage equality standard is a ‘requirement standard’ and consequently can be certified. The aim of the standard is to ensure that enterprises and institutions will be able to establish

procedures that will ensure that procedure and decision-making on wage issues will not involve gender-based discrimination. Enterprises and institutions can then seek certification from the competent authorities stating that they meet the requirements of the standard. The standard is structured according to the same sort of form as is used in control standards (e.g. the ISO 9001 quality management system and the ISO 14001 environmental management system). Whether enterprises and institutions adopt the standard will be optional. In order to obtain certification according to the standard they will have to pursue a formal application process.

It is envisaged that enterprises and institutions that consider themselves as having introduced the standard in a satisfactory manner will seek formal confirmation from a certification authority that they operate according to the requirements made by the standard. Certification authorities themselves operate according to standards, e.g. ÍST 17021 (Conformity assessment – Requirements made of institutions which undertake inspection and certification of control systems) or ÍST EN 45012:1989 (General rules applying to entities which certify quality systems). The accreditation department of the Icelandic Patent Office operates under the Accreditation (Etc.) Act, No. 24/2006, and Regulation No. 350/1993 on the activities of accredited certification authorities. In order to ensure achievement of the aims of the equal wages standard, it will be necessary to ensure that its contents are adequately publicised and that certification bodies are trained and granted accreditation.

The task force of the government and the organisations of the social partners should then be commissioned to draw up a detailed plan on how the wage equality standard is to be publicised among employers and wage earners.

In consultation with the Ministry of Welfare and the Gender Equality Centre, the accreditation department of the Icelandic Patent Office is to define what professional requirements (e.g. regarding expert knowledge of equality issues and wage equality between the sexes) – i.e. what accreditation requirements – certification bodies are to meet in order to be able to grant certification on the basis of the standard.

A pilot project on the introduction of the standard should be established. This would set up a consultation forum with participation by enterprises and institutions that are interested in introducing the standard, offering advice and access to expert knowledge and skills.

At the end of 2015 the results of the introduction of the equal wages standard should be assessed, following which it should be decided whether work should begin on the production of a standard covering gender equality in access to employment and job development.

### **1.3 Awareness-raising**

It is vital that enterprises, institutions and the public at large be aware of the extent and nature of gender-based discrimination regarding wages. Measures must be taken to promote an awakening of awareness in society regarding the issue and to support enterprises in improving their wage-equality performance and to support individuals in their quest for redress of their standing where gender-based wage discrimination is being practised. It must be ensured that the topic is under discussion on a year-round basis so that individuals, enterprises and institutions will be conscious of what gender-based wage discrimination consists of and what form responses to it can take.

It is important to gather, in a single location, all materials relating to differentials so that, over time, an authoritative database on the matter will be assembled. Such a database would

include results of domestic studies on wage differentials between the sexes, measures taken by the government and their degree of success, information on the situation in Iceland's neighbouring countries and information on measures that have been taken abroad and what effect they have had. In addition, a sort of "toolbox" should be established for employers in which they could find definitions of terms applying to gender equality regarding wages, information on job classification and studies of wage equality, in addition to the interpretation of provisions of the Gender Equality Act regarding wage equality, taking account of European Union legislation in this area.

The task force consisting of representatives of the government and the organisations of the social partners should present a two-year schedule covering publicity and awareness-raising measures in which allowance should be made for meetings and conferences on gender-based wage discrimination on the Icelandic labour market, i.e. its causes, measures available and the results of measures taken.

The Gender Equality Centre shall establish and maintain a data source on gender-based wage differentials, i.e. gather the necessary materials and make them available to the public, enterprises and institutions.

## **1.4 The social framework**

It is important to give attention to the social framework that is in place in society when differences in wages between the sexes are under discussion: this is an immensely important influencing factor which affects the opportunities open to men and women regarding employment and professional development. Both domestic and foreign studies indicate very strongly that two of the main explanations of the on-going differences in wages between men and women are, on the one hand, the different family obligations imposed on men and women, and on the other the gender divisions that exist on the employment market.

Participation by women in the labour market in Iceland has long been at a high level, which has called for changes in the division of tasks in the home, together with a need for new ways of integrating family and working life. Women have also been pursuing education far more than in the past and in a great range of fields than before. Increasingly, and for a long time now, women studying in Iceland's universities have been qualifying in professional areas which used to be exclusively male preserves. On the other hand, there has been no increase in the number of men choosing to work in traditionally female occupations.

### **1.4.1 Maternity and paternity leave**

Soon after the economic collapse in Iceland in autumn 2008, it became clear that various measures were needed to redress the poor standing of the national treasury. Measures taken included cuts in disbursements by the Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Fund. The government has been aware that these measures, though necessary, could affect how people took maternity, paternity and parental leave, and therefore emphasises that these measures were only temporary.

It is therefore important that the Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave Act be reviewed as soon as possible with the aim of reversing the changes that have been made to this legislation since 2009. It is planned to take the first steps in the resuscitation of the maternity/paternity and parental leave system during the 141st legislative session of the Althingi in autumn 2012.

It must also be regarded as important to carry out a broad survey of how parents take maternity/ paternity and parental leave, i.e. to identify the reasons why some parents do not make use of their entitlements, the effect that leave has on the division of roles and

responsibilities in the home, the care and day-care arrangements for children after maternity/paternity and parental leave comes to an end and the position of parents on the labour market after they take maternity/paternity and parental leave. This is particularly important because the number of fathers who take paternity leave has fallen in recent years in Iceland and a Norwegian study shows that up to one quarter of gender-based wage differentials can be attributed to the different ways in which men and women use their leave entitlements. Thus, wage differentials come about to a large extent because women withdraw from the labour market to a greater degree than men do in connection with the birth and post-natal care of children; similar results were published in a recent Danish study of wage differentials. A study of differences in women's and men's wages made several years ago in Iceland indicated that 7.5-11% of the wage differentials were due to the fact that marriage, childbirth and other factors affected women's wages in a way that was different from their effects on men's wages.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore important to oppose these various influences, both through the maternity/paternity leave arrangements and by other means.

Regarding leave arrangements, it is clear that mothers take far longer leave than fathers. They are also more likely to change their involvement in the labour market in order to bridge the period in between the end of maternity leave and the time when their young children receive places in day care. This period needs to be made as short as possible, and preferably there should be no wait at all for day-care placements. This goal could best be achieved by lengthening maternity/paternity leave, on the one hand, and by taking measures to ensure day-care placements for young children on the other. When lengthening leave entitlement, attention must be given to ensuring the most even possible division between fathers and mothers. If leave were lengthened to twelve months, it is clear that a 6-6 division would produce a more even utilisation by fathers and mother than would 5-5-2 or 4-4-4.

A study should be made of how parents take maternity/paternity leave, including an analysis of why some parents do not make full use of their entitlements, the effect that leave has on the division of roles and responsibilities in the home, the bridging of the gap between the end of maternity/paternity leave and the beginning of day-care arrangements for children and the position of parents on the labour market after they take maternity, paternity and parental leave.

#### **1.4.2 Measures against gender divisions on the labour market**

Gender divisions are very much in evidence on the Icelandic labour market, and it is probable that this fact contributes to how great gender-based wage differentials are. Studies both in Iceland and abroad indicate that this is the case, and it can probably be expected that no single measure would be more likely to have a positive effect on gender-based wage differentials than to break down the gender divisions on the labour market.

Central and local government, the trade unions and employers should join together in the production of a long-term programme of action to remedy this situation, with the emphasis on increasing the numbers of men entering traditionally female occupations and women entering traditionally male occupations.

#### **1.4.3 Integration of family and working life**

The employment rates among both women and men are high in Iceland, and it is therefore necessary to enable both women and men to attend to tasks both inside the home and at work.

In collaboration with the Gender Equality Council and the Gender Equality Centre, the Minister of Welfare appointed a task force on the integration of family and working life on 26

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.forsaetisraduneyti.is/media/Efnhasleg\\_vold\\_kvenna/EVKskyrla.pdf](http://www.forsaetisraduneyti.is/media/Efnhasleg_vold_kvenna/EVKskyrla.pdf)

June 2012. The role of the task force includes providing employers and wage-earners on the labour market with information on methods of facilitating the integration of family responsibilities and the demands of the labour market. The task force is also to follow up and process the proposals of a committee on the integration of family responsibilities and the demands of the labour market, which were submitted in June 2011, and to investigate the advantages of shortening the working week to 36 hours. It was also commissioned with organising and holding a conference in collaboration with the organisations of the social partners at which the priority will be on having academics deliver lectures and “model enterprises” will describe how they meet the needs of their employees as regards the integration of family and working life.

A task force is at work on the integration of family and working life and is to submit its findings and proposals not later than 1 April 2013.

#### ***1.4.4 Larger proportions of women in senior management of enterprises***

The Act No. 13/2010 amended the Public Limited Companies Act and the Private Limited Companies Act. The amendments included important provisions regarding gender ratios on the boards of directors and in the executive management of these companies. The aim of these provisions is to achieve a more even balance in the ratios of men and women in positions of influence in both public and private limited companies.

The Ministry of Industries and Innovation is to organise information and compile publicity material to draw attention to the fact that the legislation mentioned above has taken effect. Attention shall also be drawn to the responsibility, and duty, of the management and board members of enterprises, the aim being to increase their ability to carry out their tasks, with an emphasis of including women in this. In addition, a database of those who have undergone such training shall be compiled so that managers and board members are able to contact each other and to make it easier for enterprises to find competent managers and board members.

## **2 Measures regarding the public sector**

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### **2.1 Registration in Orri and the ÍSTARF-classification system**

Orri, the state's information and human resources database, offers great potential as regards the preservation and management of information. First, mention should be made of the fact that details of workers' positions, length of employment and qualifications can be recorded: all these factors have a decisive influence on decisions regarding wages. In 2012, in collaboration with Statistics Iceland and the National Financial Management Agency (Fjársýsla ríkisins), the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs has worked on registration and classification of jobs in state institutions in the ÍSTARF system, this involving an upgrading of registrations in Orri. It is expected that this work will be complete in 2012. Correct registration in ÍSTARF is of value not only for analysing gender-based wage differentials; it is also a prerequisite for international comparisons regarding jobs and wages.

In collaboration with Statistics Iceland and the National Financial Management Agency (Fjársýsla ríkisins), the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is to see to registration in the state information and human resource database.

When registrations are made in the information and human resource database, detailed procedural rules shall be followed in order to ensure that the data is suitable for comparative purposes. In this way, civil servants will always be included in wage surveys which Statistics Iceland bases on data that is collected using comparable methods from the payroll accounting systems of enterprises, municipalities and government institutions.

### **2.2 Wage equality surveys**

It is hoped that regular surveys of the payroll accounts of enterprises and institutions will produce the desired results when it comes to evening out the differences between men's and women's wages. The Personnel Department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs has prepared instructions on wage equality surveys which are intended to serve the same purpose as the 'Signpost' ('Vegvísir'), which was discussed in the report of 2008 by the task force on a wage equality policy for the private sector. The instructions have been used in wage surveys in the government ministries, with good results.

The ministries are to confer on setting themselves a wage policy in which the emphasis is to be on establishing a stronger framework for the determination of wages in order to ensure that it will be transparent and relevant.

When compiling job descriptions, the ministries and government institutions are to give more attention to ensuring that they reflect the aim of constituting a clear basis for the determination of wages.

Attention should be given to examining the structure and content of collective agreements in the private sector with a view to assessing the extent to which gender-based wage differentials can be attributed to systemic factors.

The Personnel Department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs should seek convenient and effective means of making wage analyses cutting across the institutional structure of the state, and should explain to the managers of the institutions the methodology used in wage surveys.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is to appoint a task force with a brief to examine the registration of data on civil servants' jobs, educational qualifications and length of service and assess what explanatory variables are regarded as relevant and also whether other relevant explanations should be taken into account when analysing wage differences between the sexes.

Each individual ministry is to draw up a schedule before the end of March 2013 in collaboration with the institutions that operate in their respective fields concerning the execution of wage equality surveys, with the result that by the end of 2015, all government institutions are to make annual wage surveys. The schedule is to be produced in collaboration with the instructional heads and the National Financial Management Agency (Fjársýsla ríkisins).

## **2.3 Guidelines for directors and managers of institutions regarding criteria for wage reviews**

Correct job categorisation and registration of educational qualifications, length of working experience and other factors that influence wages are necessary steps to be taken before wage surveys are made within institutions. The Personnel Department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs has prepared guidelines on the best methods of conducting wage surveys with the aim of ensuring that gender-based wage discrimination is not practised in state bodies. In collaboration with the personnel department, the National Financial Management Agency (Fjársýsla ríkisins) has prepared a special report to facilitate the making of such surveys and ensure that various institutions work with comparable data. If a wage survey reveals that gender-based wage differentials are in operation, the managers are required to intervene and rectify the wages of those who are being discriminated against.

The Personnel Department of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is to prepare guidelines for the directors and managers of state institutions on how to respond if wage analyses reveal the existence of gender-based wage differentials.

## **2.4 Job evaluation**

Job evaluation involves the detailed assessment of jobs in each enterprise in which the value of jobs is measured in a uniform manner. Wages for each job are then determined on the basis of the evaluation, regardless of workers' individual competence or performance. The job evaluation system is based on a uniform assessment of jobs by applying systematic and coordinated criteria to the requirements that each job makes of the worker.

The aim of job evaluation is to ensure that workers' wages will be determined on the most relevant, impartial and objective considerations possible. Job evaluation is intended to result in jobs being ranked in such a way that the basic wages paid for jobs that are assessed as making equal demands will be equal, independent of the positions involved, the unions to which the workers belong and whether the occupation in question is a traditionally female or male preserve. By using job evaluations, the premises and reasons on which wage decisions are based are made clear and transparent. The main advantage of the job evaluation system is that it is a recognised way of determining the same basic wage for different jobs which are evaluated as being comparable and of equal worth.

In 2000 the City of Reykjavík and the local authorities' wages committee, together with their principal counterparts, agreed on the adaptation and introduction of a British job evaluation system, the "Single Status Job Evaluation System". The City of Reykjavík and most of the municipalities in Iceland have used it when determining wages, and in their opinion it has produced good results, particularly as regards securing gender equality in wages. Experience shows, however, that job evaluation alone is not sufficient, since it only covers

the basic ranking of jobs. It is necessary to take account of the whole package, i.e. daytime wages plus all other payments over and above contractually negotiated wages.

Job evaluation can be used as a study tool, i.e. for assessing whether jobs which are traditionally done by women are undervalued as compared with jobs of equal worth which are traditionally done by men and, after this, to assess the advantage it would have for the state to introduce a job evaluation system.

A study project should be set up involving job evaluation to see whether jobs which are traditionally done by women are undervalued as compared with jobs which are of equal worth but are traditionally done by men. In this study, the criteria and procedural methods of the job evaluation system should be applied to 40 selected jobs in the public sector in order to discover whether gender-based wage differentials are found in this sample when the content and value of the jobs are taken into account using these methods, and if so, how great the differentials are. Thereafter, the potential advantage for the state that would ensue from introducing job evaluation for the determination of basic wages should be assessed. The study project must be implemented as follows below. To follow it up, two employees who will be trained as job evaluation experts by the City of Reykjavík should be engaged.

**Method:** A sample of jobs in the public sector should be selected, representing their distribution across the various institutions. A pilot group should be established, with representatives of the institutions involved and an equal number of representatives of the employees' trade unions. Those who are engaged to make the study should attend meetings of the pilot group. The pilot group should have the same role as the job evaluation committee consisting of representatives of the City of Reykjavík and of the trade unions.

**Execution:** An agreement should be made with the City of Reykjavík on expert assistance with training job evaluations experts for this project, advice on execution, courses for the pilot group and access to the computerised job evaluation system used by the City, which has been adapted to conditions on the Icelandic employment market.

**Findings:** The findings of the study should be compared with actual wages paid. The findings should identify those jobs, or rather those groups of employees, who do not enjoy equal terms for jobs of equal worth, and should therefore be of use in formulating a policy on special measures to be taken in order to redress their position.

### **3 Monitoring**

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The executive committee on gender equality regarding wages will monitor the execution of the plan of action. It shall meet regularly to review the situation and call for status reports from the persons responsible for individual projects. At the beginning of each year, the executive committee shall submit a report to the Minister of Welfare on the progress made with the measures taken and the results they have produced.