

THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN IN ICELAND CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF ADVOCACY



This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Ombudsman for Children in Iceland. The institution was established in January 1995, under Act No. 83/1994. The role of the Ombudsman for Children is to guard and promote the interests, rights and needs of all children in Iceland and pay close attention to changes in the conditions of childhood development. The Ombudsman also monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was incorporated into Icelandic law in 2013.

To commemorate the 30-year anniversary the Ombudsman hosted a celebratory event in Harpa Concert Hall on the 9th of January. The Prime Minister of Iceland, Kristrún Frostadóttir, addressed the event and emphasized the importance of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the institution's independence. The Ombudsman for children, Salvör Nordal along with former Ombudsmen, Þórhildur Línadal and Margrét María Sigurðardóttir spoke about the development of the institution and successful initiatives that the office has established over the past 30 years. Key areas of focus have included ensuring access to education for all children, tackling bullying and school refusal, monitoring waiting lists and addressing social exclusion. In recent years, there has been an emphasis on children's right to participation, in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. To that end, the Ombudsman initiated the establishment of a Children's Forum in 2019, held every other year, as well as children's elections in connection with presidential and parliamentary elections. The next Children's Forum will take place in November this year. The Ombudsman also operates a young advisory group for children, aged between 12 to 17, the group plays a vital part in the work of the Ombudsman, and the role of the young advisory group was codified in 2018 with amendments to the Act on the Ombudsman.



This year, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in Iceland will focus on the topic of child-friendly justice, with a report mapping the status of child-friendly justice in Iceland to be published later this year. The term "child-friendly justice" refers to justice systems that ensure the respect and effective implementation of all children's rights at the highest attainable level, taking into account the child's level of maturity, understanding, and the specific circumstances of the case. It is justice that is accessible, age-appropriate, timely, diligent, and adapted to meet the needs and rights of the child. The Office of the Ombudsman has conducted a consultation with children who have come into contact with the law, as offenders, victims, or witnesses, in non-judicial, judicial, and administrative proceedings, in order to better understand children's experiences with these systems.

The Ombudsman for Children remains committed to advancing the rights and well-being of all children in Iceland, ensuring their voices continue to be heard and respected. Over the past 30 years, significant progress has been made in advancing the rights of children in Iceland. However, there is still much work to be done. Key challenges remain among others, to address long waiting lists for services and improving treatment and support for children with behavioural issues and those affected by substance abuse. As we celebrate the accomplishments of the past three decades, the focus must remain on these ongoing issues, striving for a future where every child in Iceland has the opportunity to thrive and receive the support they need.

