

Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity



Government of Iceland
Ministry of Social Affairs



The Minister of Social Affairs and Children in Iceland has presented a bill on the integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity.

The presentation of the bill is part of comprehensive changes in the interest of children, that have been in preparation since early 2018.



A Message from the Minister

In November 2017, I took office as Minister of Social Affairs and Equality. Shortly after I proceeded to change the title to better fit my main emphasis as a minister. From the beginning of the 2019 I have been Minister of Social Affairs and Children.

Long before I took office, I have been passionate about making Iceland the best place in the world for children and had a vision for how to make that happen. After having spent more than a decade in politics, being a father to three children and having been a child some time ago, I have been vigilant and kept an eye out for the things I feel need to be changed to make this vision a reality. I have noticed that in some cases, the changes needed are small, e.g. increased cooperation between service providers. In other cases, the changes need to be on a larger scale, e.g. changing the child protection system in the entire country.

I have been working towards this goal ever since my first day in office and hundreds of individuals, institutions and organizations have contributed to this effort. In my view, this journey is above traditional politics and therefore I also included all political parties in the Icelandic Parliament. After having dealt with a difficult winter through the first quarter of the year 2020, an epidemic during the rest of the year, and not knowing what would happen next, I kept my ministry focused on creating a bill on the matter that was then presented to Parliament in late 2020. In fact, three bills were introduced to Parliament and there are more to come.



The Process

In May 2018 the Minister of Social Affairs and Children hosted a national conference on early intervention in the interest of children. During the conference the Minister presented his vision for what needed to be done and called for detailed scrutiny of the system as it was, review of what has worked well, what needed to change, and how. The conference was well received, and the overall response was positive.

The work that followed focused on developing an effective and thorough conversation between different systems, stakeholders, experts and politicians, but also with the users of the system, families, parents and especially the children themselves on how the system should work for children. The consensus of these conversations was that walls needed to be torn down between the different systems providing services to children, such as the education and health systems, social services and, in some cases, the police, placing the child in the forefront.

In September 2018 a declaration of willingness was signed by the Minister of Social Affairs and Equality (Now Minister of Social Affairs and Children), the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Transport and Local Government as well as the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities. This signature marked the unanimous will of all signatory parties to abolish obstacles between service providers and to improve services for children, creating a more child-friendly society.

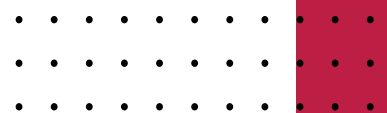
In October 2018 an inter-political committee, consisting of representatives from all parliamentary parties, majority as well as minority, commenced its work in the interest of children's prosperity. In January 2019 a steering group on children's prosperity, consisting of representatives from all ministries whose ministers signed the declaration of willingness as well as a representative from the Prime Ministry and an audience member from the Association of Local Authorities commenced its work. The committee and steering group had the task of creating the legislative bills that the Minister of Social Affairs and Children has presented to Parliament.

In March 2019 an invitation to take part in the preparations for the legislative changes was sent, by the Minister of Social Affairs and Children, to all municipalities and schools in Iceland. There was great interest, considerably beyond expectations. From

that time until May 2019 eight subgroups on different matters regarding children's prosperity, consisting of representatives from municipalities, state, schools and individuals, met and submitted their findings. In October 2019 a large conference was held to review the status of the preparation and the preliminary plans for legislation were introduced.

From March to May 2020 a comprehensive monetary and economic evaluation of the draft legislation took place. During that time, the final drafts for three (out of six) bills were ready and in May the drafts were introduced to the public by way of a public consultation forum created by the Icelandic government. The three draft bills, A bill about integrating services in the interest of children's prosperity, Act on The National Agency for Children and Families and Act on The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare for integrating services in the interest of children's prosperity, were presented to parliament in November 2020. So far, the bills have enjoyed extremely positive inter-political support.

From May to October 2020, the existing regulations and legislation regarding services in the interest of children's prosperity were reviewed and in early 2021, bills on new and revised legislation will be presented to Parliament. The goal is to have all legislation in formal effect in 2021 and its adoption well underway.





Bill on Integrating Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity

Stages of Services

For the first time in Iceland, services in the interest of children's prosperity are, according to the law, divided into three stages. By doing so, service providers will have better overview of systems providing services and a clearer image of how effective and comprehensive services can be ensured for every child.

Primary level services include basic services and early assistance for all children and families. Its aim is to further each child's prosperity. Early assistance is provided in accordance with a preliminary assessment of a child's needs and systematic follow-up.

Secondary level services include more targeted assistance and resources. Targeted assistance is based on a professional and/or preliminary assessment of a child's needs and a support plan for integrated services and follow-up.

Tertiary level services include specialized assistance resources to safeguard instances where a child's prosperity is, or could be, endangered. These services shall be provided in accordance with specialized and thorough assessment and/or analysis of a child's needs and a support plan for integrated services and follow-up.

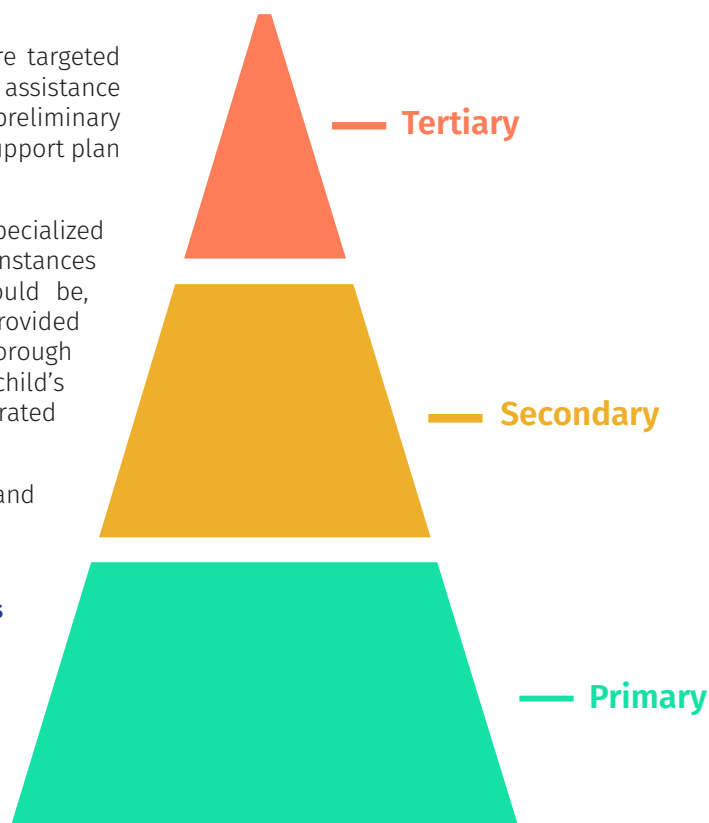
All services shall be categorized and defined with these levels in mind.

Integration of Services – Coordinators – Case Managers and Teamwork

Children in need of early assistance, along with their families, are ensured access to a specific coordinator in the child's environment. This coordinator gives information

and instructions on services, ensures access to assessments, organizes and follows up on integration of services, if more targeted or specialized assistance than can be provided on the primary level is needed. The coordinator who works at the primary level will typically work within the health care, pre-school, primary school, college or social services, wherever a child would seek services on a regular basis according to its age.

If children, and their families, need more targeted or specialized assistance, i.e. move up to secondary or tertiary levels, they will be ensured access to a case manager with their



municipality's social services. The case manager will advise and give information on services, assist with ensuring access to assessments and/or analysis of a child's needs, be responsible for the creation of a support plan and leading the support team as well as following up on services provided in accordance with the support plan.

The bill states that children and families shall be able to turn to a coordinator/case manager to lead their case within the system. At the request of a child, or its family, active cooperation is put in place within the child's service providers. Cooperation between the family and service providers could e.g. entail that the service providers connected to a child's case would be authorized to exchange relevant information on the child's circumstances and situation.

Access to a coordinator and/or case manager is, according to the bill, ensured from the time a child is born until it reaches 18 years of age. Similar types of services will, if need be, be accessible for parents during pregnancy.

Rights of Children and their Families

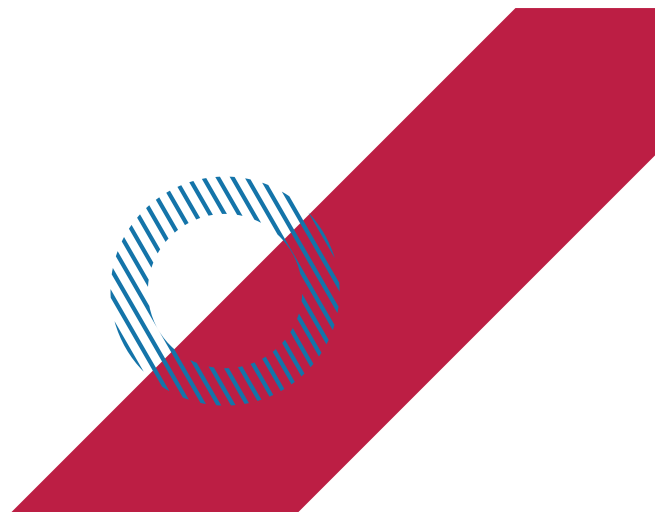
All services in the interest of children's prosperity shall be provided based on what is in the best interests of the child. Service providers shall respect the rights, and obligations, of parents or other carers in the upbringing of their children and children's independent rights, taking into consideration the children's views in accordance with their age and development.

Service providers shall work towards comprehensive and active cooperation with children and their families based on mutual respect and trust.

To ensure cooperation with children and their families, and to ensure that the families' privacy is respected as much as possible, the processing of personal information based on the bill, is unauthorized without explicit and specific consent from the relevant child and/or its family.

Support and Supervision of Service Providers

At the same time as the Act on the integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity was presented to Parliament, two other bills were presented; A bill on The National Agency for Children and Families and a bill on The National



Supervisory Authority for Welfare for integrating services in the interest of children's prosperity.

The National Agency for Children and Families will be a central advisory center. It will oversee activities and work based on the Child Protection legislation as well as support authorities providing services in the interest of children's prosperity, both within state and municipalities. It will hold a "toolbox" for resources and support the processes of certain individual cases. It will also oversee the processing of information in databases and digital solutions supporting the integration of services for children's interests in general and more specifically within the realm of child protection.

The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare for Integrating Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity will supervise the quality of welfare services and the integration of those services. The Inspectorate will adhere to a coordinated supervisory system wherein it will have permission for supervision based on claims made by users as well as based on proactive supervision.

Dashboard on Children's Prosperity

In order to monitor children's prosperity in Iceland and support the adoption of the legislation, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in cooperation with the municipality of Kópavogur, and UNICEF Iceland, have developed a dashboard on children's prosperity. The dashboard holds statistics that give an overview of the prosperity of children and young people in Iceland.



Photo: Haraldur Jónasson

The dashboard consists of five dimensions that are based on the general principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1. **Education**
2. **Equity**
3. **Health and Wellbeing**
4. **Security and Protection**
5. **Social Participation.**

The dashboard provides information that can be used in the prioritization of projects and funding as well as in policy development, by government and municipalities.

Economic Impact Assessment

During the preparation of the Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity the Ministry of Social Affairs retained a third-party economist to evaluate its cost effectiveness and economic impact for both state and municipalities.

The analysis revealed that the results of the changes that will take place following the adoption of the legislation, will on the one hand reduce the number of adverse childhood experiences and on the other hand increase children's abilities to work through these experiences. Cost effectiveness of the changes will take a number of years to become fully realized, that is until the children that have received services according to the new legislation reach adulthood. It is clear however that the legislation is cost effective and will even yield returns on par with the most profitable investments the Icelandic government has made.

During the first years of the adoption of the act, costs will be higher than returns. In the long run, returns weigh much heavier than the costs. The conclusion of the economic analysis is that in or around the year 2070, returns should reach 11%. In addition, the Act will have no negative environmental impact and only positive impact on the lives of children and their families, leading to increased overall wellbeing and prosperity of the nation.

Child Friendly Iceland

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has previously pointed out that the Icelandic government has lacked a holistic policy on the implementation of the CRC. Furthermore, that such a policy would have to include the important role municipalities play in the implementation of the CRC. In February 2019, the Minister of Social Affairs and Children presented for approval of the government a proposal to start the task of developing policy on increased participation of children and young people in government policy-development. Also, the development of a framework for institutionalization of Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) for all greater decisions affecting children made by the government, including legislative bills. The government agreed on that proposal.

Based on this decision, the formation of a policy on the implementation of the CRC began. Its objective is to form a comprehensive frame around the implementation and steps that ministries in Iceland have already taken. Work on the policy is based on the General Comments of the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the committees concluding observations towards the Icelandic government. The Strategy has been developed in cooperation with UNICEF Iceland, other ministries and the Icelandic Office of the Ombudsman for Children, as well as the Icelandic Youth Council. It was placed into open consultation in June 2020 and is now being completed.

In connection with the policy, in November 2019, the minister of Social Affairs and Children and the director of UNICEF Iceland signed an agreement on cooperation on the adoption of the project on Child Friendly Cities. With that, the Ministry and UNICEF Iceland became partners in assisting Icelandic municipalities in their implementation of the CRC. The goal of the cooperation is that at least 70% of children in Iceland will reside in a formally Child Friendly Municipality by the end of 2024.