

“A brief look at NGOs in Iceland”

ELIAMEP is a partner of the Icelandic Human Rights Center (ICHR), based in Reykjavik, Iceland (<https://www.humanrights.is/en>). This is a short text, prepared by ICHR, that serves as a brief introduction to the NGO sector in Iceland.

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NGOs in Iceland affect the lives of most people in the country in one way or another - either through direct participation or by benefiting from their work. NGOs have taken up important roles in serving the public and especially certain minority groups. NGOs play a crucial role in promoting development and aiding governments in achieving their goals of peace, democracy, good governance, health, prosperity and equality. They are active in campaigning and advocating for necessary changes. They also offer researched and well grounded information and advice to governments on issues of concern and are vigilant in monitoring and pointing out issues that need to be addressed.

For these and other reasons, NGOs have enjoyed the goodwill and support of Icelandic state authorities, the business community and the public in the country. In view of the social role of non-governmental organizations, state authorities have recognized their status and work through various tax incentives and other incentives. Although most NGOs in Iceland are government funded, they are free to criticize the government without having to fear any repercussions. Even if Icelandic NGOs would often like more of their recommendations to be carried out, they still carry weight in their consultory role. Many NGOs are also funded through membership fees, grants, donations etc.

Despite the increased emphasis on professional education within NGOs, volunteer work is still the main driving force within their ranks. A large part of the Icelandic population are members of one or more NGOs and do voluntary work on a regular basis. However, because of that, it can be difficult to get people together. As mentioned above, most of them are volunteering their work on a voluntary basis.

It is therefore convenient in many ways that the Icelandic community is small. When there is a need for gathering people for a cause, the communication channels are short, which makes it easier to approach people personally for a cooperation. Icelandic NGOs have also

found that in unity there is strength. Putting differences aside and striving towards a common main goal, has proven to give better results. By showing solidarity and listening to the issues of other groups, NGOs have managed to build up an effective network of professionals, activists and relevant stakeholders, all working for different rights but often towards a common goal.