

# Assessment of the Work of the Welfare Watch



## Study Description

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## MINISTER'S FOREWORD

### The Welfare Watch – an innovation success

The financial crisis of 2008 presented Icelanders with a brand-new situation. February 2009 saw the decision to set up a Welfare Watch. The Welfare Watch was intended to monitor the social and financial consequences of the financial crisis for families and households in Iceland, assess the measures already taken, propose improvements, and implement them on behalf of the government. The Welfare Watch has been staffed by representatives of various stakeholders, e.g. the labour market, municipalities, government agencies and ministries – all parties who in one way or another are connected to the welfare system and work on welfare issues. The Welfare Watch has proven its worth. It has played a crucial role and helped improve the situation of various groups in society who needed support. It has also been an important forum for discussing the issues surrounding the disadvantaged in society. It is, however, still important to monitor developments and receive proposals for improvements.

It is vital to promote welfare in the Nordic countries for the future. The decision was made, therefore, that one of the tasks of the 2014 Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers would be the 2014–2016 Nordic Welfare Watch. The project is a three-year research project which aims to strengthen and promote the sustainability of the Nordic welfare systems, by promoting research and increasing collaboration and the exchange of experience and knowledge between the Nordic countries. The project aims to find ways of measuring and monitoring citizens' welfare, to study the effects of financial crises and the consequences thereof on Nordic welfare systems and to contribute to informed policy-making in welfare matters. A presentation given by representatives of the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland introducing a draft assessment report for the Welfare Watch for 2009–2014 (part of the overall Nordic project) showed just what a good job the Welfare Watch has been doing. The Welfare Watch is to be congratulated for this.

The Welfare Watch has no direct foreign model to base itself on and can therefore be considered a powerful and successful example of innovation that we Icelanders can be proud of. I am convinced that history will look back on the Icelandic and Nordic versions of the Welfare Watch as having ultimately improved welfare in the Nordic countries and better enabled them to handle unexpected setbacks.

*Eygló Harðardóttir*



## SUMMARY

The financial crisis in the autumn of 2008 created a new playing field in Icelandic society. Many people lost their jobs, and the Icelandic economy fell into deep recession. One of the government's responses to the financial crisis was to set up the Welfare Watch, which was in operation from early 2009 to December 2013. This assessment report discusses the organisation, implementation and outcome of the proposals made in the course of this first Welfare Watch.

The work of the Welfare Watch has been assessed by means of interviews, questionnaires and content analysis. Data was collected in the autumn of 2014. Interviews were held with the Head of the Welfare Watch, one of the project's workers and three other representatives from the steering committee. The various ministers in office during the lifetime of the Welfare Watch were also interviewed. Discussions were held in two focus groups amongst working group members who had participated in the Welfare Watch activities. The project was then assessed by means of three questionnaires sent to members of the Welfare Watch working groups, staff in agencies involved in the project and the general public. Finally, the content of reports, minutes and other material connected to the Welfare Watch was analysed in order to gain insight into the organisation of the project and the proposals generated.

The Welfare Watch was set up and mandated by Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, then Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security. The Minister entrusted the then-Head of the Welfare Service, Lára Björnsdóttir, with the task of running the Welfare Watch and recruited Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, who at that time worked as an expert in the Employment and Equality Office, to work on the project. The Director of the Icelandic Federation of Skilled Construction and Industrial Workers, Þorbjörn Guðmundsson, was also brought in to work on the project. This group decided jointly on the composition of the Welfare Watch's steering committee.

The steering committee was made up of representatives from ministries, stakeholders, Reykjavik City Council, the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities and the third sector (NGOs). From the interviews with ministers and members of the steering committee, it emerged that people were generally satisfied with how successfully a broad group of people with varying knowledge and experience had been put together. The steering committee set up working groups to deal with the various projects that it deemed urgent to tackle. Each working group was headed by a chairman who also sat on the Welfare Watch steering committee. These chairmen had the task of calling upon people with expert knowledge in the specific fields dealt with in each group. Each working group had the task of assessing the consequences of the financial crisis on the group in question and proposing improvements for the use of the steering committee in its interim reports to the government.

When the Welfare Watch was set up, it was given the task of monitoring the social and financial repercussions of the financial crisis on individuals and families and proposing improvements. The Welfare Watch's mandate was renewed during the term of office of Guðbjartur Hannesson. The commission letter he issued stated that the steering committee must keep both the government and public fully informed and act independently. A survey among the members of

the Welfare Watch working groups contained questions on how well the Welfare Watch had fulfilled its role. A large majority, i.e. 84%, felt that the social and financial consequences of the economic crisis had been well monitored, but fewer considered that proposing improvements had been successful. The role of the Welfare Watch was also discussed in interviews with ministers and members of the steering committee. These discussions included what people understood regarding the Welfare Watch's independence. Respondents agreed that the Welfare Watch had been independent in the sense that the group decided for itself what issues were discussed and how these issues were discussed. Some, however, felt that a working group appointed by the government could hardly be considered independent.

The Welfare Watch handled projects of various types. Meetings were held on the situation in Icelandic society in both the steering committee and working groups, and the steering committee of the Welfare Watch also issued conclusions, recommendations and challenges; wrote five progress reports containing recommendations for the government; had audits done; and organised meetings and forums. These projects were more often than not aimed at children, families with children and young people. Respondents from the steering committee agreed that urging municipal councils to ensure school-meal provision was one of the most important recommendations the committee had issued and that the number of schools offering children free porridge in the morning had risen considerably. The recommendation to ensure children's dental health was also considered to have been effective.

The defined role of the Welfare Watch was to act as analysts and advisors. In two cases, however, the Welfare Watch was actually responsible for implementing projects. One of these two projects was to set up social indicators – respondents from the steering committee felt this to be one of the most important of the Welfare Watch's projects. These social indicators provide a collection of statistical data in one place, enabling the public and the government to follow developments and changes in society and compare the situation of various groups to that in other countries. The other project was to set up the Suðurnes Watch. The results of the Suðurnes Watch include fostering co-operation between the police, social services and child protection services in the field of domestic violence.

Meetings of the Welfare Watch steering committee were used to discuss the activities of the working groups, to present the work performed at the workplaces of the group's members and to gain insight and expertise from individuals outside the Welfare Watch. The role of the Welfare Watch chairman was to convene the group and oversee its activities. They did not, however, set the group specific tasks, as the members of the steering committee would generally reach their own conclusions as to which matters needed attention at any given time. Interviews with members of the steering committee included discussions of how the group's meetings had been used. Respondents appreciated how often the Welfare Watch met, particularly in the early stages of the financial crisis when many matters were pressing. There were, however, some instances of excessively long agendas and meetings. Some indicated that excessively long meetings could get in the way of members' other activities and prevent material presented by attendees from being

utilised as it should. There were high levels of satisfaction with the work of the chairman, who was considered to possess a good deal of knowledge and experience.

Assessing the work of the Welfare Watch included assessing working methods and management within the working groups. The replies given by respondents suggest that working methods were similar to those present in the steering committee. The chair ran and convened the group, but in every other respect, things were done by teamwork, with the group deciding collectively what material was worth examining. From focus group discussions, it emerged that, in some cases, the division of tasks within working groups was unclear. A questionnaire answered by members of the working groups showed that 57% of respondents were satisfied with how tasks were divided within their groups, while 13% were unsatisfied.

Interviews with members of the steering committee revealed that, while heated debates on individual matters were frequent, the group had worked well together. A majority (78%) of working group questionnaire respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the level of communication with others in the working group. Respondents from the Welfare Watch working groups did, however, consider that more co-operation was needed between the steering committee and the working groups. It was considered important to strengthen the ties between the members of the working groups and the steering committee to ensure that the members of the working groups gained a better understanding of what was expected of them. Information was requested on the results of the work carried out in the working groups.

Analyses of progress reports from the working groups and interim reports from the steering committee to the government revealed that the steering committee utilised the work performed by the working groups to propose improvements. The working groups formulated most of their proposals in 2009 – the first year of the Welfare Watch operations – and the steering committee passed on most proposals to the government that same year. The steering committee focused on the issues of unemployed people, bolstering labour-market measures, household debt issues, and education issues, to name but a few. Information on the website of the Icelandic national parliament (hereinafter “Alþingi”) for 2009–2013 was looked at in order to ascertain what had happened to the various proposals put by the steering committee to the government. Several plans and legal acts entering into force in the early years of the financial crisis closely resemble proposals made by the Welfare Watch. Examples of this are various labour market measures for young people not covered within the unemployment insurance system and measures for people struggling with mortgage payments.

Interviewees considered the Welfare Watch to have had a significant effect on welfare in Iceland at the beginning of the financial crisis. This was also the case for individuals external to the Welfare Watch. Surveys among the general public and the staff in public bodies represented in the Welfare Watch revealed that half of those who had heard of the Welfare Watch considered it to have been very important for Icelandic society in the early years of the financial crisis. One aspect of the importance of the Welfare Watch was the various reports containing proposed improvements used by the government to prioritise tasks. One respondent indicated that the work of the Welfare Watch may have contributed to fewer cutbacks being made in welfare than in other

areas. Note was also made of the fact that, although not all the Welfare Watch's proposals had been implemented, its work had an indirect impact on welfare in Iceland by raising awareness about issues requiring attention. Increased debate subsequently led to entities other than the government taking on such issues.

Through the Welfare Watch, various public bodies and organisations worked together on welfare issues, and representatives of the Welfare Watch felt they had learnt a great deal from their participation in this cross-discipline project. Respondents agreed that co-operation on a broad basis had played a crucial role in efforts to improve the situation of people in Iceland. A large majority of working group members expressed pride at having taken part in the Welfare Watch working groups.

## INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Welfare gave the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland the task of assessing and mapping the work of the Welfare Watch, which was set up in 2009 following the economic collapse. The Welfare Watch operated until the end of 2013, and a successor project was set up in June 2014. The aim of the assessment study was to assess the organisation, work and results of the work performed by the Welfare Watch in 2009–2013. The assessment study is a part of the *Nordic Welfare Watch* study project launched on the occasion of the Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The project aims to strengthen and promote the sustainability of the Nordic welfare systems by promoting research and increasing collaboration and the exchange of experience and knowledge between the Nordic countries. It is important for welfare systems to be able to deal with changes and challenges. Iceland focuses on using and sharing its own experience, and the experience gained by other Nordic countries, of financial crises. This expertise will be used to assess the effect on public welfare and on Nordic welfare systems, as well as the effect on specific groups in society. This will enable an assessment of what has been successful and where further improvements are needed. There will also be an assessment of the ability of welfare systems to deal with danger, whether natural or man-made, and with the consequences thereof. Research shows that greater knowledge is required of long-term reactions in this field. The project will run from 2014 to 2016 and is split into three main areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no date). The assessment study focused on in this report is part of the *Nordic Welfare Watch and Responses to Danger*.

### ***Nordic Welfare Watch and Responses to Danger***

This project component included an assessment study on the work of the Welfare Watch, which is dealt with in this report. The response systems of the Nordic countries will be mapped, focusing on the role of welfare systems and, specifically, social services. Knowledge of the potential challenges that Nordic welfare systems may need to face in the future will be collated with a view to protecting welfare from potential negative consequences. An answer will be given to the question of whether or not there is good reason to set up a Nordic Welfare Watch. The findings of this study will be allied to the study findings under other project components and used as a basis for proposals regarding a Nordic Welfare Watch (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no date). The project is run by a group of Nordic academics and experts headed by Guðný Björk Eydal, Professor in Social Work at the University of Iceland's Faculty of Social Work.

## ***Recession and welfare – Lessons for the future***

There will be an analysis of which measures taken in response to economic crises in the Nordic countries were successful, what could have been done better and which consequences of the financial crises are attributable to a lack of action on the part of the government. To this end, a co-ordinated database will be set up containing statistical data and policy measures implemented in individual countries. This database will be used to compare countries and time periods in this context. It provides plenty of material for analysing links between government measures and successfully exiting recessions with as little effect as possible on citizen welfare (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no date). The project is run by a group of Nordic academics headed by Stefán Ólafsson, Professor in Sociology at the University of Iceland's Faculty of Social and Human Sciences.

### ***Nordic welfare indicators***

Nordic welfare indicators will be developed. Importance is placed on finding or developing indicators that describe the state of citizen welfare in the Nordic countries. It is important for such indicators to point to possible negative developments for the general public or specific groups, in order to enable the government to take countermeasures as quickly as possible. Nordic welfare indicators will be an important addition to bolstering the foundations of future policy-making in welfare matters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no date). The project is run by a group of Nordic experts and academics headed by Sigríður Jónsdóttir of the Ministry of Welfare.

## **Aims of the assessment**

The Welfare Watch was set up by the government in February 2009 and ran until December 2013. A successor project was set up in June 2013 to take over from the previous one. This report deals with the Welfare Watch that was set up in 2009. The purpose of the Welfare Watch was to monitor the social and financial consequences of the economic collapse on homes in Iceland and to submit proposals and opinions to the authorities. A steering committee was set up composed of representatives from ministries, government agencies, municipalities, unions, non-governmental organisations and others. Figure 1 on page 18 gives the names of all agencies and organisations represented in the steering committee at the end of the Welfare Watch's operations. Under the steering committee were a number of working groups, each chaired by a member of the steering committee. The Welfare Watch submitted five interim reports to the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security (later the Minister of Welfare) as well as many other reports. These are available on the Welfare Watch website (<http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/velferdarvaktin>). The Welfare Watch also ran several specific projects, e.g. conducting independent surveys, setting up social indicators and setting up a welfare consultation group in Suðurnes (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

The aim of the assessment study dealt with here was to assess the organisation, work and results of the proposals submitted by the Welfare Watch over the years it operated. A detailed analysis was made of the establishment, organisation and role of the Welfare Watch, as well as its tasks and working groups. Working procedures, management and co-operation in both the steering

committee and working groups were looked into by means of questionnaires and interviews. The proposals made by the Welfare Watch steering committee and working groups were looked at and their results assessed. An analysis was also made of which working group proposals were supported by the Welfare Watch steering committee. An attempt was also made to ascertain how these proposals had fared in Icelandic society, by analysing the government's reaction to the proposals submitted by the Welfare Watch during this period.

The assessment was conducted by experts from the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland. A group of consultants was also at hand: Guðný Björk Eydal (Professor at the University of Iceland heading the *Nordic Welfare Watch and Responses to Danger* project), Lára Björnsdóttir (former Ministry of Welfare expert and Chair of the Welfare Watch 2009–2013) and Ingibjörg Broddadóttir (a Ministry of Welfare expert and member of the Welfare Watch staff). The consultancy group met with the project managers of the assessment study in the preparation stages, gave advice on designing and conducting studies and assessment tools (questionnaires, interview guides, interview frameworks) and provided comments on the report to be published.

Experts from the Social Science Research Institute presented a draft report at an early-morning meeting at the University of Iceland on 10 December 2014. The report will be translated from Icelandic into other Nordic languages and was translated into English in the spring of 2015. It will be available on the websites of the Ministry of Welfare and the Social Science Research Institute.

## METHODS

The assessment project described here aims to assess the quality and value of the work under examination and is, in that respect, different from research where the main aim is to gather data and create new knowledge (see for example Hatry, 2007; Patton, 1990; and Scriven, 1991, on quality assessment and success measurement). The assessment aims to give information on what has been successful in the Welfare Watch's operations, what needs to be changed, what should be improved and whether or not the Welfare Watch or a similar project should be continued. Two different approaches were used in the assessment. One is an objective/outcome approach and the other, a management approach. Focus was placed on how the stated objectives have been achieved and on extracting those aspects that could be of use to the Ministry of Welfare when taking decisions on continuing or changing operations. The report describes the aims of the Welfare Watch and the contribution and input into the project. This is followed by a description of the process and output of the project. This concludes the descriptive purposes of the assessment, and there is no attempt at assessing the outcome of the project; this comes under the *Recession and welfare – Lessons for the future* project described above (page 10).

The same two approaches underpin data collection, whether for an assessment or research in social sciences. Quantitative methods are generally used for large groups of people when the aim is to compare deeds, attitudes and characteristics by statistical means. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, are based on the notion that reality is variable and that people perceive things in different ways. The aim of qualitative studies is to understand people's circumstances from the viewpoint of those taking part in the study. Under this method, researchers collect data directly without using questions involving pre-determined reply options. This method enables researchers to get right into the heart of the topic under study (Creswell, 2008). Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to assess the organisation, work and results of the proposals submitted by the Welfare Watch over the years it operated.

### Surveys

Questionnaires were compiled by the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland in co-operation with the consultancy group of the assessment study. Data was collected by means of three online questionnaires:

- a) A questionnaire sent to the members of the Welfare Watch working groups
- b) A questionnaire sent to the Welfare Watch affiliates
- c) A questionnaire for the general public, sent to a sample from the Social Science Research Institute's online panel



### ***a) Survey among the members of the Welfare Watch working groups***

The operations and development of the Welfare Watch are described in a Ministry of Welfare report (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). Information on the composition of the Welfare Watch's working groups 2009-2013 was taken from that report. The report gives details of when people began and ended work in their working group(s). A questionnaire was sent to all those who had sat in a working group at any time when the Welfare Watch was in operation. There was no overall list of working group members' e-mail addresses available at the time. Finding everybody's e-mail address online or by other means involved a considerable amount of work.

An online questionnaire was sent on 9 September 2014 to the 124 members who sat in the Welfare Watch working groups in the period 2009–2013. Four e-mail reminders were sent to ensure a high rate of reply. Data collection ended on 24 September 2014. In total, replies were received from 79 individuals, i.e. 64% response rate (see Table 1).













***Table 1. Survey sent to the members of the Welfare Watch working groups***

Data gathered	9 - 24 September 2014
Data-collection method	Web survey
Total population	124
Number of respondents	79
Response rate	64%

### ***Background of participants in the survey among the members of the working groups***

Table 2 gives an overview of the background of those taking part in the survey sent to members of the Welfare Watch working groups. Proportionately more women than men answered the questionnaire (59% women and 41% men); this tallies with the gender share in the working groups themselves. The average age of respondents was 53.4 years, and one in four respondents were also members of the Welfare Watch's steering committee.












**Table 2. Background of participants in the survey among the members of the working groups**

	Number of respondents	Response percentage	Response percentage
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	36	46%	 46%
Female	43	54%	 54%
<b>Age</b>			
24–49 years	20	25%	 25%
50–59 years	39	49%	 49%
60–68 years	20	25%	 25%
<b>Field of employment</b>			
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	12	15%	 15%
Education	16	20%	 20%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	14	18%	 18%
Other public services	20	25%	 25%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	17	22%	 22%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>			
Member of the steering committee	18	24%	 24%
Not member of the steering committee	58	76%	 76%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

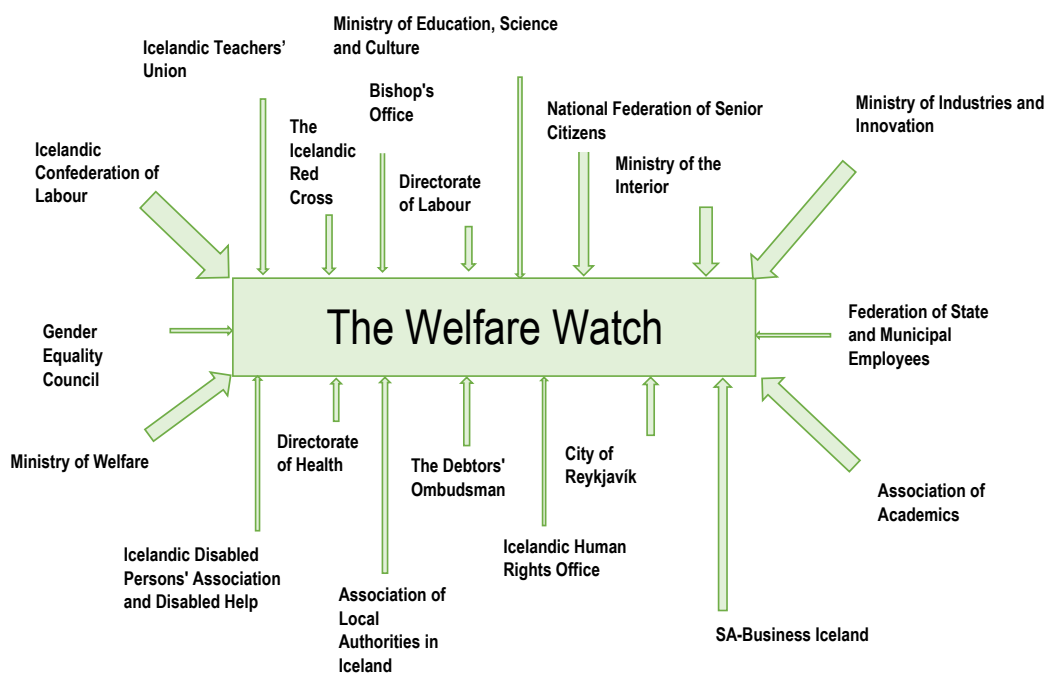
Table 3 gives a breakdown of participants by working group. Some were members of more than one working group, but recipients of the questionnaire were asked to reply in respect of the working group in which they had participated most. The small number of members in each group made it impossible to analyse the background of the results by working groups.

**Table 3. Breakdown of participants by working group**

	Number of respondents	Response percentage	Response percentage
Suðurnes Watch – collaborative working group on welfare in the Suðurnes region	15	20%	 20%
Group on social indicators	12	16%	 16%
Financial difficulties of households	11	15%	 15%
Children and families with children	8	11%	 11%
Youngsters and young adults	7	9%	 9%
Persons at risk both before and after the crash	5	7%	 7%
The unemployed	5	7%	 7%
Public health group	4	5%	 5%
The joint group of unemployed people and young people	3	4%	 4%
The recession and health	2	3%	 3%
Basic services group	2	3%	 3%
<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100%</b>	
Don't know	5		
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>		

## b) Survey among the Welfare Watch affiliates

Many agencies and organisations had representatives in the Welfare Watch's steering committee and working groups who were involved with the work carried out there. The Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland put together a list of the staff of those agencies which were represented in the Welfare Watch. An overview of these agencies and organisations is given in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Welfare Watch affiliates**

(Source: Based on a report from the Welfare Watch steering committee, see Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

The sample included directors, managers, nurses, lawyers, experts, administrators and project managers at the various agencies and organisations. Only people performing work directly linked to the operations of the agency or organisation in question were contacted. Reception, cleaning, IT staff, drivers, cooks and secretaries were therefore excluded. Staff without a registered e-mail address and staff on leave were not included in the sample.

Reykjavik City Council employees dealing with welfare issues were also contacted. It was decided to confine contact to council employees working in welfare and school and leisure activities. The names and e-mail addresses of staff dealing with school and leisure matters were obtained from the general office of the department in question. Information on school principals was available on the Reykjavik City Council website. Primary-school principals, deputy principals and department heads (in some cases, project managers) were also sent the questionnaire, as were nursery-school principals and deputy principals. If no e-mail address could be found for these individuals, then the department head was selected. The questionnaire was also sent to schoolmasters and deputy schoolmasters in secondary schools. In those cases where the deputy schoolmaster was not registered, the questionnaire was sent to the school director or head

teachers. Finally, it was ensured that those present in the working group sample did not also receive the questionnaire for affiliates.

A web survey was sent to the Welfare Watch affiliates on 17 October 2014. Four e-mail reminders were sent to ensure an appropriate rate of reply, and data collection ended on 13 November 2014. A total of 768 replied, i.e. a response rate of 71% (see Table 4).














**Table 4. Survey sent to the Welfare Watch affiliates**

Data gathered	17 October – 13 November 2014
Data collection method	Web survey
Total population	1082
Number of respondents	768
Response rate	71%

**Background of participants in the survey among the Welfare Watch affiliates**

Many more women than men answered the questionnaire (74% women and 24% men); this tallies with the gender division among the staff of the Welfare Watch affiliates (one-quarter men, three-quarters women). The average age of respondents was 50.2 years (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Background of participants in the survey among the Welfare Watch affiliates**

	Number of respondents	Response percentage	Response percentage
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	202	26%	 26%
Female	566	74%	 74%
<b>Age</b>			
22–39 years	134	17%	 17%
40–49 years	202	26%	 26%
50–59 years	273	36%	 36%
60–79 years	157	20%	 20%
<b>Field of employment</b>			
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	65	9%	 9%
Healthcare services	49	7%	 7%
Education	302	41%	 41%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	110	15%	 15%
Other public services	99	13%	 13%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	61	8%	 8%
Other sector or outside labour market	48	7%	 7%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### ***c) Survey among the general public (The Social Science Research Institute's online panel)***

The online panel of the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland comprises 7,000 individuals aged eighteen and older across the whole of Iceland who have agreed to take part in the Institute's online surveys. Participants in the online panel are chosen by random sample from the national register. Participants are recruited for the online panel on a continuous basis, and the composition of the panel is closely monitored. For instance, efforts are made to ensure that the gender, age, residence and education profile of the panel is as close as possible to that of Icelanders generally, aged eighteen and above. Ensuring the quality of the online panel in this way makes it possible to extrapolate results in surveys based on the answers the panel gives.

A stratified random sample of 1,499 individuals was taken from the Social Science Research Institute's online panel. The sample was stratified by gender, age and place of residence in such a way as to be as representative as possible of Icelandic society as a whole. The sample of the Welfare Watch affiliates was compared to the sample from the online panel to check for duplicate entries who would receive two questionnaires. Two such duplicates were found and removed, leaving an online panel sample of 1,497.

Data collection began on 4 November 2014 and ended on 21 November 2014. Four e-mail reminders were sent to ensure an appropriate rate of reply. A total of 948 answered the survey, a response rate of 63% (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Survey sent to the general public**

Data gathered	4 - 21 November 2014
Data collection method	Web survey
Total population	1497
Number of respondents	948
Response percentage	63%

Table 7 gives a breakdown of the respondents and of the Icelandic population as a whole by gender, age, place of residence and education. The average age of respondents was 46.4 years. The table indicates a difference in the age profile of respondents as compared to the general population, owing to the fact that fewer young people replied than expected. Similarly, there was a difference in the education level of the respondents and the education level of Icelanders aged eighteen and above generally. The percentage of university graduates was higher among respondents than among Icelanders generally, according to data from Statistics Iceland. The data collected was weighted by gender, age, place of residence and education to make the results as accurate a representation of the Icelandic population as possible.

**Table 7. Background of participants among the general public, with a comparative breakdown of the respondents and of the Icelandic population as a whole by gender, age, place of residence and education**

	Number of respondents	Response percentage	Total population	Proportion of population
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	483	51%	122.482	50%
Female	465	49%	123.149	50%
<b>Age***</b>				
18–25 years	91	10%	38.926	16%
26–35 years	158	17%	45.568	19%
36–45 years	174	18%	41.999	17%
46–55 years	184	19%	43.062	18%
56–65 years	165	17%	36.146	15%
66–75 years	101	11%	22.131	9%
Age 76 and older	75	8%	17.799	7%
<b>Residence</b>				
Greater Reykjavík area	625	66%	158.041	64%
Outside Reykjavík area	323	34%	87.590	36%
<b>Education***</b>				
Primary school education	119	13%	89.528	38%
Secondary school education	331	37%	85.947	36%
University degree	445	50%	60.863	26%

There is a significant difference in the number of respondents and the population number; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### **Processing quantitative data**

The results of the three questionnaires are plotted in tables and figures showing the proportion of each reply given. The tables give only the replies of those who answered each question, which means that total numbers of replies may differ from table to table. Some columns give an aggregate total of answers from two or more reply options. In such cases, the percentages given in the columns may differ slightly from the percentages arrived at by adding the individual proportions in the table together. This is due to rounding up to the nearest decimal place.

### **Working groups**

The questions put to the working groups are analysed by gender, age, field of work and whether or not the individual in question was also in the steering committee. The survey among members of the working groups was a population study aimed at all those who have worked in the Welfare Watch working groups during the period 2009–2013. Therefore, no significance tests were calculated to assess the difference of the distribution of replies between groups. It should be borne in mind that percentages should be interpreted with care, as the number of respondents behind each percentage is often low.

### **Affiliates**

Replies to the questionnaire sent to Welfare Watch affiliates, i.e. those agencies and organisations with representatives in the steering committee over the years the Welfare Watch operated, are analysed by gender, age and field of work. No significance tests were calculated to assess the difference of the distribution of replies between groups, as participants in the survey were chosen on the basis of their suitability. It is therefore not possible to extrapolate the results to any other group than that which took part in the survey.

### **General public (*The Social Science Research Institute's online panel*)**

Percentage figures are calculated from weighted replies. The tables give percentages and numbers of replies broken down by gender, place of residence, marital status, whether or not respondents have children at home, education, labour-market status, income, household income and respondents' voting intentions if there were to be an election tomorrow.

A chi-squared significance test was used to assess whether or not there was a significant difference in the replies of the different groups. Statistical significance is indicated by a system of asterisks. One asterisk indicates that there is a less than 5% chance of the difference observed in a given group being coincidental ( $p < 0.05$ ). In other words, it can be claimed with 95% certainty that the difference observed among respondents also exists among Icelanders as a whole in November 2014. Two asterisks indicate that the difference is significant with 99% certainty ( $p < 0.01$ ), and three indicate that the difference can be claimed with 99.9% certainty to exist in the overall population ( $p < 0.001$ ). If the significance test is invalid owing to too few members in a given group, the abbreviation "inv" is used.

## **Individual interviews, focus group interviews and content analysis**

Eight individual interviews were held – three with various ministers of welfare regarding the Welfare Watch, one joint interview with the chair and a member of the Welfare Watch steering committee and interviews with three other individuals who were part of the steering committee at one point or another in the period the Welfare Watch operated. Discussions were also held in two focus groups of people who had participated in the Welfare Watch. Finally, the content of reports and other published material from the Welfare Watch was analysed.

### **Qualitative interviews with ministers and members of the Welfare Watch steering committee**

Open interviews are one way to collect data under qualitative research methods. They provide information on what the interviewees consider significant, what importance they place on the topic under study and how they understand and define specific items. In open interviews, the subject of the discussion is usually determined in advance but not the specific content of the discussion. The researcher encourages the interviewee to talk about topics relevant to the study but also allows

them to speak freely from their own viewpoint. Interviews therefore differ from one participant to the next, despite the subject under study being the same (Kvale, 1996).

On 20 June 2014, a joint interview was held with Lára Björnsdóttir, Head of the Welfare Watch, and Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, an employee of the Welfare Watch. Three more interviews were held with members of the steering committee from 26 June to 3 July 2014. Interviews were then held with the three ministers of welfare involved in the operations of the Welfare Watch. On 4 July 2014 an interview was held with Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security from February to May 2009. Ásta Ragnheiður was the founder of the Welfare Watch and also appointed its steering committee. Ásta Ragnheiður's successor, Árni Páll Árnason, was interviewed on 9 July 2014. Guðbjartur Hannesson succeeded Árni Páll in 2010 and was interviewed on 30 June 2014. Guðbjartur was minister until May 2013, when Eygló Harðardóttir took over as Minister of Social Affairs and Housing.

An interview guide was prepared to refer to during individual interviews. This enabled researchers to keep the discussion topics to the subject of the study, although efforts were made to allow interviewees to talk about whatever they felt to be important and in the order they desired. Interviews usually began with an open question about the interviewee's involvement in the Welfare Watch. This was followed up with questions and discussions regarding the development, purpose, importance, organisation, procedures, collaboration and results of the Welfare Watch. Finally, interviewees were asked if they had anything to add. This enabled them to bring up any other issues they felt to be important but which were not directly related to the questions put to them by the researcher.

Interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed by reading each interview carefully and extracting themes or main issues by giving each section a name, a technique known as encoding. The encodings emerging from all interviews were then grouped into main themes and sub-themes. The ministers, the Head of the Welfare Watch and the Welfare Watch employee were named personally in the write-up of the interviews and were informed at the beginning of their interviews that this would be the case. References to these individuals in the report were submitted to them for their approval. Three members of the steering committee who were interviewed were not named in the report.

### ***Focus groups of members of Welfare Watch working groups***

Focus groups, or group interviews, enable a large amount of data to be collected in a short time. By holding discussions in small groups, it is possible to get to the attitudes and experiences of a given group as regards the subject of a study. This is the researcher's way of listening to people talk together and learning about what they have to contribute (Sóley S. Bender, 2003).

Discussions were held in two focus groups, the members of which were people selected from the Welfare Watch working groups in the period 2009–2013. Twelve people were called to each focus group. Nine attended one of them and five the other. Discussions were held at the University of Iceland on 25–26 August 2014. Each group met for ninety minutes.



Beforehand, an interview framework was prepared with elements to be discussed. Discussions began with introductory remarks from the moderator, explaining the purpose and expected benefits of the study. Participants were then asked to introduce themselves. They were then given a few minutes to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the Welfare Watch and note down their thoughts. This was followed up with questions and discussions regarding the development and purpose of the Welfare Watch, the procedures and organisation of working group meetings, collaboration within the groups and the results of their involvement in the Welfare Watch. Finally, participants were encouraged to express further thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of the Welfare Watch that had not already been discussed in the groups.

The groups' discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then carefully read and encoded. These encodings were then grouped into main themes and sub-themes. Interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality, and the interviews will not be published in their entirety. Participants are not named in the write-up of the interviews. Neither are they referred to directly if it is deemed that certain information could be traced back to the individual in question. Findings will therefore be presented as the opinion of the groups instead of describing the views of individual participants.

### ***Content analysis***

Qualitative content analysis is based on analysing an available text. This text could be of various text types, e.g. books or other published material, minutes or transcribed interviews. This method is used to gain insight into a given issue and enables the researcher to form a new picture of the issue under study. The text is analysed by reading it carefully with the researcher's questions in mind and encoding it with a view to categorising and locating key concepts and patterns in the text (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

As part of the assessment of the Welfare Watch's work, texts were analysed and grouped under various themes in order to obtain information on how the Welfare Watch was organised, which proposals came from the steering committee and which proposals were selected by the steering committee from the reports of the working groups and sent on to the government. The following material was analysed: a 2013 summary of Welfare Watch operations (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press), steering committee minutes, steering committee and working group reports and other material published by or related to the Welfare Watch on the Ministry of Welfare website (<http://www.velferdarraduneyti.is/velferdarvaktin/skyrslur/>). Proposals were submitted to the government, but it is difficult to assess which measures were subsequently taken on the basis of the Welfare Watch's work. To try to gain an idea of the fate of the proposals submitted to the government during this period, material from the Alþingi website (e.g. action plans, work programmes and parliamentary documents) from 2009–2013 was looked at. There were also efforts to find reactions to the Welfare Watch's proposals on the website of its affiliates, particularly the municipalities.

## FINDINGS

### Establishment of the Welfare Watch

The financial crisis in the autumn of 2008 caused havoc in Icelandic society. The collapse of the banks in October was followed by a series of bankruptcies and redundancies, sharp recession and job losses. In September 2008, 1% of the residents of Iceland were registered as unemployed. Three months later, this figure was 5% (Directorate of Labour, 2008). There were large-scale demonstrations outside Alþingi. One of the demonstrators' demands was that the then-government (a coalition of the Independence Party and the Social Democratic Alliance) should stand down. The government broke down on 26 January 2009 following an internal dispute, and a new coalition government (comprising the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement) came to power (Work Programme of the Social Democratic Alliance and Left-Green Movement Coalition Government, 2009).

The concept of a “welfare watch” first appeared in the work programme of the new government as one of their responses to the new situation. The idea caught the attention of the media on 3 February 2009 when a journalist from the *Morgunblaðið* newspaper asked the new Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security, Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, about this item in the government's work programme. Ásta Ragnheiður stated that the concept was not new and that she herself had used it often over the years, but that the circumstances created by the financial crisis had thrown the idea into relief (“Government on Welfare Watch, February 2009). The creation of the Welfare Watch was approved at a cabinet meeting on 10 February 2009.

The creation of the Welfare Watch was discussed in interviews with ministers and members of the Welfare Watch steering committee. The Welfare Watch was born out of specific circumstances. The ministers and the steering committee members all agreed that it would not have been created if it had not been for the sudden changes in Icelandic society that were seen. Setting up the Welfare Watch was one of the first tasks of Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir when she became the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security. In her interview, she described the situation in Iceland in the first few months following the economic collapse. Many people had lost their jobs and children suffered from changing situations within their families. According to Ásta Ragnheiður, many MPs were very concerned that the new circumstances might pose a threat to certain groups in society. The Alþingi Social Affairs Committee and MPs therefore, began collecting information on the financial crisis in Finland and the consequences thereof. The percentage of individuals on disability pension in Finland rose following the crisis and reached very high levels among people of a given age group. The Icelandic government considered it important to prevent a rise in the numbers on disability pension. Emphasis was also placed on protecting children from the effects of the crisis. It was, therefore, decided to include setting up a “welfare watch” in the coalition agreement of the new Social Democratic Alliance/Left-Green Movement minority government. As Ásta Ragnheiður was Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security in that government, it fell to her to set up the Welfare Watch.

It is slightly reminiscent of [...] a country finding itself at war – such a major shock for so many. People losing their jobs, relatives of all those in trouble, not least children suffering from the situation, and so on. The shock needs to be worked through. This sort of thing has never happened to us before. This was an extraordinary new situation and a reaction had to be found. Particularly in order to avoid the same problems experienced in Finland [Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

Ásta Ragnheiður gave Lára Björnsdóttir the task of heading the Welfare Watch and recruited Ingibjörg Broddadóttir. They had both been working at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security at the time the Welfare Watch was set up. Ingibjörg, who at the time managed the Ministry's Welfare Service, was named Head of the Welfare Watch. Ingibjörg was an expert in the Employment and Equality Office. Ásta Ragnheiður was asked why she had chosen Lára and Ingibjörg to run the Welfare Watch:

They were the most competent and experienced candidates. They knew the welfare system so well and had been working on welfare issues for so long—and I knew them both so well—that I knew that they were the best people for the job. They had a lot of experience of working with and appearing before the Alþingi Social Affairs Committee [...]. I feel that many people owe them a debt of gratitude for all the work they took on at such a difficult time [Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

The Director of the Icelandic Federation of Skilled Construction and Industrial Workers, Þorbjörn Guðmundsson, was also brought in to work on the project. One of the first tasks for the Welfare Watch's head and staff was to decide who would make up the steering committee. The steering committee had the task of overseeing the project, co-ordinating data collection and communicating Welfare Watch proposals. According to Lára and Ingibjörg, the decision on who was to make up the steering committee was taken in consultation with the Minister and Hanna Sigríður Gunnsteinsdóttir, Permanent Secretary to the ministry. Lára likened the task of deciding who belonged in the Welfare Watch steering committee to spinning a spider's web. The inner circle was made up of ministry staff, then people working in various areas of society. This included representatives of the Church of Iceland, the Red Cross, Reykjavik City Council, the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities, the municipalities themselves, and SA-Business Iceland. On 17 February 2009, once the composition of the steering committee had been decided, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security sent a letter to the individuals in question requesting their participation in the Welfare Watch. Replies arrived quickly, and just two days later, a notice was posted on the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security website announcing that the Welfare Watch steering committee had been appointed (Ministry of Welfare, 2009a).

Everybody replied. The line was drawn and everybody responded in the most positive way. Right from day one. That was what was so unbelievable. Maybe it was because the foundations were there; everybody was desperate and afraid [Lára Björnsdóttir, former Head of the Welfare Watch].

Setting up the Welfare Watch was in the coalition agreement of the minority government in power from 1 February 2009. The Welfare Watch was intended to run for eighty days up to the

next general elections. At that point, it was unclear whether it would operate after the eighty days were up, as it was unknown which parties would form a government after the general elections. The Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement formed a new government after the elections held on 25 April 2009 and Árni Páll Árnason took over as Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security. It therefore fell to him to decide whether or not the Welfare Watch should continue. According to him, he immediately decided that it should. This decision was based on his opinion that it was important to monitor developments in society closely in order to be able to react quickly if it emerged that the crisis was affecting a specific group particularly badly. The Welfare Watch staff also recommended to the Minister that the Watch continued to operate. The existence of the Welfare Watch made it possible to find information in one place where experiences were pooled, rather than having to apply to various experts in order to monitor the situation.

## Development and organisation of the Welfare Watch

### *The ministers of the Welfare Watch*

Four ministers gave the Welfare Watch their mandate in the five years it operated: Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, Árni Páll Árnason, Guðbjartur Hannesson and Eygló Harðardóttir. Ásta Ragnheiður was Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security from 1 February to 10 May 2009. She was minister in Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's minority government, following the collapse of the Independence Party/Social Democratic Alliance coalition. Ásta Ragnheiður gave the Welfare Watch its mandate by means of a letter appointing the steering committee of 17 February 2009. The letter stated that the Welfare Watch was meant to "effectively monitor the social and financial consequences of the bank collapse on Icelandic families and individuals and propose measures to help households" (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a). In the eighty days during which Ásta Ragnheiður was minister, she did not attend steering committee meetings. She did, however, follow the work of the committee via the Head of the Welfare Watch, Lára Björnsdóttir, and the Welfare Watch employee, Ingibjörg Broddadóttir (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press).

Árni Páll Árnason succeeded Ásta Ragnheiður as Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security. He served as such from 10 May 2009 to 2 September 2010 in Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's government, a majority coalition composed of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement. Árni Páll did not formally renew the Welfare Watch's mandate while he was minister, despite being asked to do so. Lára and Ingibjörg were asked what the significance of a renewed mandate was for the Welfare Watch. They indicated that a renewed mandate was asked for because the time had come to formally redefine the role of the Welfare Watch. That said, the non-renewal of the Welfare Watch's mandate did not affect its working methods, as it had always in any case worked independently.

Minutes shows that Árni Páll attended a total of four meetings of the steering committee in the time he was minister. On the first occasion, on 12 June 2009, he informed the committee of possible economising measures in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security (Ministry of

Welfare, 12 June 2009). He subsequently expressed his wish to take advice from the steering committee, seeing the importance of the Welfare Watch in those unstable times. In the spring of 2010, Árni Páll submitted a steering committee report to Alþingi. The report contained a summary of the issues dealt with by the Welfare Watch in its first year of operations, an overview of what was ahead and a description of the proposals that had been submitted. At Árni Páll's second meeting with the steering committee, on 9 March 2010, the Head of the Welfare Watch, Lára Björnsson, declared that the time had come to give more thought to what was expected of the Welfare Watch. Árni Páll replied that the Welfare Watch should monitor developments and promote specific research. He indicated that the Welfare Watch had no executive role and that its task was to monitor the situation in society and inform the government of such. He stressed the independent nature of the Welfare Watch and reminded members that they could discuss matters at their meetings free of restriction and did not need to consult the minister as regards their conclusions (Ministry of Welfare, 9 March 2010). In this way, Árni Páll described the role the Welfare Watch was to perform without actually renewing its mandate in writing.

The Welfare Watch's mandate was formally renewed in October 2010, one month after Guðbjartur Hannesson became minister. Guðbjartur was minister from 2 September 2010 to 23 May 2013, first as Minister of Health and Social Affairs, then as Minister of Welfare from 1 January 2011, when the Ministries of Health and of Social Affairs and Social Security were merged into one Ministry of Welfare. Guðbjartur renewed the Welfare Watch's mandate by means of a terms of reference document sent to the steering committee (Ministry of Welfare, no date (a)). A certain change in focus can be detected in these terms of reference as compared to the first letter appointing the steering committee's members. The steering committee was described as "an advisory body to the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security and the government", with the extra role of providing targeted information to the government and general public. It was also indicated that the Welfare Watch was independent from the government (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). In the two and a half years that he was responsible for the Welfare Watch, Guðbjartur attended one steering committee meeting but met regularly with the Head and employee of the Welfare Watch. At his meeting with the steering committee, on 13 September 2011, Guðbjartur highlighted that the Welfare Watch was independent and should give constructive criticism and guidance. Its role was to propose improvements and provide the government with a certain level of support (Ministry of Welfare, 13 September 2011). He confirmed at this meeting that the Welfare Watch was free and independent from the government; he had hitherto only discussed this definition with the Head and employee of the Welfare Watch (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press).

Eygló Harðardóttir was the next Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, taking office on 23 May 2013 after the Independence Party and Progressive Party formed a coalition. She attended a meeting of the steering committee on 25 June 2013, where she expressed her satisfaction with the work of the Welfare Watch. She also confirmed her view that the Welfare Watch should continue to operate (Ministry of Welfare, 25 June 2013). The Welfare Watch ended operations on

December 2013, and Eygló appointed a new Welfare Watch in June 2014 (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

The minister, therefore, appointed and mandated the Welfare Watch but otherwise had little involvement in its work. Communications between the Welfare Watch and the minister were mainly channelled through the Head of the Welfare Watch, Lára Björnsdóttir. According to Lára, a tradition developed whereby a formal meeting was held with the minister whenever the Welfare Watch issued specific proposals. In addition, Lára was in informal verbal contact with the minister, as she worked in the ministry.

We were able to discuss matters [...] and of course, the Minister could ask: “What’s the Welfare Watch’s view on this, informally?” So we would of course have conversations. Sometimes, I was asked in my capacity as a member of the Welfare Watch rather than as a ministry employee [Lára Björnsdóttir, former Head of the Welfare Watch].

### ***Welfare Watch steering committee***

When the Welfare Watch was set up, the steering committee had fifteen members. Lára Björnsdóttir represented the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security. There were also representatives from the Icelandic Confederation of Labour, the Association of Academics, the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, SA-Business Iceland, the Bishop’s Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Icelandic Teachers’ Union, Red Cross Iceland, Reykjavik City Council, and the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities. Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, employee of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, and Þorbjörn Guðmundsson, from the Icelandic Federation of Skilled Construction and Industrial Workers, also worked with the group (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press; Ministry of Welfare, 2009a).

The idea initially was not to have too big a group, but member numbers grew with time. According to interviewees from the steering committee, there were two reasons for these additions. First, existing members considered on occasion that somebody was missing, and second, there were some examples of independent organisations asking to be represented. The steering committee received its sixteenth member – a representative appointed by the Icelandic Disabled Persons’ Association and Disabled Help – on 27 February 2009 (Ministry of Welfare, 27 February 2009). In October, a representative of the Directorate of Labour joined the group. This individual was appointed by the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security (Ministry of Welfare, 13 October 2009). Later that month, a Director of Health appointed by the Ministry of Health on behalf of the Directorate of Health joined the group (Ministry of Welfare, 27 October 2009). When Equality Watch was wound down at the end of 2009<sup>1</sup>, the Head of Equality Watch was brought in to work in the Welfare Watch (Ministry of Welfare, 8 December 2009).

In October 2010, the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security appointed the Debtors’ Ombudsman – a new function at the ministry – to the steering committee (Ministry of Welfare, 12

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<sup>1</sup> Equality Watch was set up by Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, then Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security, in early 2009 to assess the consequences of the economic situation on the gender situation (Minister of Welfare, no date (b)).

October 2010). A representative of the National Association of Senior Citizens joined the group in August 2012, and the Icelandic Human Rights Centre appointed a representative in February 2013 (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). The steering committee thus gradually grew from fifteen members to 22. According to Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, she occasionally heard suggestions that the Welfare Watch was too big, but she never agreed with this criticism.

I think it was right to have many people around the table and to include not just the public sector but also independent organisations and others involved in welfare matters [Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

Interviewees were generally satisfied with how successfully a broad group of people with varying knowledge and experience had been put together. For instance, Árni Páll Árnason (Ásta Ragnheiður's successor as minister) claimed to be satisfied with the composition and set-up of the Welfare Watch.

During this five-year period, there were some changes to the composition of the group, both because of changes in human resources in the represented agencies and because of the active participation of deputies in steering-group meetings (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). Members were not specifically paid to participate in the Welfare Watch. However, meetings were held during working hours, so working for the Welfare Watch was to some extent part of their work duties, as all members represented either an agency or an organisation.

### ***Welfare Watch working groups***

In their interviews, Lára Björnsdóttir, Head of the Welfare Watch, and Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, employee of the Welfare Watch, gave an account of how the working groups were arranged. At the first meeting of the Welfare Watch, on 20 February 2009, all members of the steering committee were given the opportunity to identify which issues they felt it was most important for the Welfare Watch to focus on. Many points were made, and it quickly became clear that the committee could not discuss all the issues that were high on the agenda at the time. There was a collective decision to form individual groups to handle the various tasks selected. At the second Welfare Watch meeting, the idea of working groups was further developed; six working groups and one advisory group were proposed. There was also a discussion on who should head each of the working groups (The Welfare Watch, 27 February 2009). Each group was headed by an individual who was also a member of the Welfare Watch's steering committee. Working group chairs applied to individuals in society who were considered experts in the specific fields handled by each group. From interviews with members of the steering committee, it emerged that the field of interest and expert knowledge of the various members governed which group each chaired. According to Lára, Head of the Welfare Watch, members heading a given working group were free to choose who they called upon. The only condition imposed on the groups was that they must gather data on the group dealt with by the working group in question and submit a report with proposed improvements. Interviewees indicated that members of the working groups were selected more or less automatically. For instance, when putting together a group to discuss young people's issues, it

seemed obvious to contact the Sports and Leisure Activity Board of Reykjavik City Council, secondary schools, youth movements, student bodies, the Directorate of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Interviewees from the working groups considered that efforts to make up diverse working groups had been successful. Although it had sometimes been difficult to work with people with differing professional focuses, it was important to bring together people from different areas of society to obtain different viewpoints on the same topic.

I think, though, that it was important to get a good mix in the groups. This led to much more useful and fruitful debate [a member of a working group].

The minutes of the steering committee meeting of 27 February 2009 state that it had been decided to set up six working groups. The six groups were to be as follows: 1) working group discussing children under eighteen; 2) working group discussing young people aged 15–25; 3) working group discussing individuals who were vulnerable due to the financial crisis and recession and those who were already vulnerable prior to the financial crisis; 4) working group discussing household finances; 5) working group discussing unemployed people; 6) working group discussing health and healthcare (Ministry of Welfare, 27 February 2009). More working groups were subsequently set up. By the end of 2009, a working group discussing basic services was set up at the request of the government. A working group on social indicators and the Suðurnes Welfare Watch were set up in 2010. These two groups were, however, different from the usual working groups inasmuch as they had an executive role. At the steering committee meeting of 12 October 2010, it was decided that the working group discussing young people should be merged with the working group discussing unemployed people (Ministry of Welfare, 12 October 2010). As well as the working groups, a collaborative group was set up with the aim of fostering co-operation between the voluntary and public sectors and co-ordinating services between agencies. This collaborative group drafted a report which was posted on the Ministry of Welfare's website in the spring of 2010 (Ministry of Welfare, 2010a).

## Purpose and Role of the Welfare Watch

### ***The role of the Welfare Watch as analysts and advisers***

In interviews with ministers, members from the Welfare Watch steering committee and people in working groups, the discussion was directed towards the role and purpose of the Welfare Watch. Respondents agreed that the main role of the Welfare Watch had been monitoring the status of welfare issues and analysing the social impact of the economic collapse on the people of Iceland. In particular, the Watch was created to identify the most vulnerable groups in society. In a survey among the members of the working groups, participants were asked how well or poorly the Welfare Watch had achieved its goal. Table 8 shows that the majority said that monitoring the social, as well as the financial, consequences of the economic collapse on Icelandic families and households had been successful. Proportionally more women than men thought it had been successful, and respondents who were over 50 years of age had a more positive attitude than younger



respondents. All those who worked within the public services of the ministries, or for the local authorities, and all those who belonged to the steering committee of the Welfare Watch, said that achieving this goal had been successful.

**Table 8. How well or poorly do you think the Welfare Watch achieved its goal of monitoring the social, as well as financial, consequences of the economic crisis on Icelandic families and households?**

	Very well	Rather well	Neither well nor poorly	Rather poorly	Very poorly	Number	Very or rather well
<b>Total</b>	24%	60%	11%	5%	0%	75	84%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	19%	61%	14%	6%	0%	36	81%
Female	28%	59%	8%	5%	0%	39	87%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	16%	47%	21%	16%	0%	19	63%
50–59 years	28%	61%	8%	3%	0%	36	89%
60–68 years	25%	70%	5%	0%	0%	20	95%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	27%	45%	18%	9%	0%	11	73%
Education	7%	73%	20%	0%	0%	15	80%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	43%	57%	0%	0%	0%	14	100%
Other public services	26%	58%	11%	5%	0%	19	84%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	19%	63%	6%	13%	0%	16	81%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of the steering committee	44%	56%	0%	0%	0%	18	100%
Not member of the steering committee	16%	64%	13%	7%	0%	55	80%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

The role of the Welfare Watch was to inform ministers and the relevant authorities about the results of this information gathering concerning the status of welfare in Iceland. Interviews with ministers revealed that this work had been very important to the government. This mapping of the situation was, for example, helpful in discussions on where cuts could be made and into which projects funds should preferably be directed.

It was important to try and identify where we could best utilise any surplus we could create. Are there cut backs that should not be made, or if there is any possibility of increasing funds, where would the money be best spent? Where would the money be most effective?  
[Árni Páll Árnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security]

According to Guðbjartur Hannesson, it was highly relevant that this information was the result of the work of people holding a diversity of positions in society and who had different levels of knowledge and experience. In this way, different points of view were obtained, which may not have been brought to light if information on the status of welfare issues in Iceland had only been requested from one expert.

Very different groups were represented in the Welfare Watch, including small groups, some of which could also be defined as pressure groups. I felt it was important, because then you get a number of different perspectives [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].

Guðbjartur also pointed out that different groups in society had already spent time and funds analysing various aspects of the welfare system and the effects of the economic collapse on different people and that by calling these groups together, the ministry obtained access to information that they would otherwise not have obtained.

The advantage to the ministry was that there, you had a large pool of human resources and a tremendous value from all these groups. You had a representative from all these groups, who provided manpower, to examine and share information [...]. You could never buy this work [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].

In addition to collecting information about the status of welfare issues and communicating them to the ministers, respondents agreed that the Welfare Watch also had the role of making recommendations or suggestions on how it was possible to improve the situation of people in Iceland and in particular those groups which were vulnerable. Thus, there was a direct connection between the mapping of the status of welfare issues in society and the recommendations which were addressed to the government. It was pointed out that the Welfare Watch had the advantage of being a group that could reach a common consensus on what recommendations should be addressed to the government, instead of different groups pressuring the government separately.

In a survey among the members of the working groups, they were asked how well or poorly the Welfare Watch has achieved its goal of submitting proposals for improvement. Table 9 shows that 63% of respondents said that it had been successful in achieving that goal.

**Table 9. How well or poorly do you think the Welfare Watch has achieved its goal of submitting proposals for improvement?**

	Very well	Rather well	well nor poorly	Rather poorly	Very poorly	Number	Very or rather well
<b>Total</b>	15%	48%	24%	7%	6%	71	63%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	9%	44%	32%	9%	6%	34	53%
Female	22%	51%	16%	5%	5%	37	73%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	5%	32%	37%	11%	16%	19	37%
50–59 years	15%	58%	18%	6%	3%	33	73%
60–68 years	26%	47%	21%	5%	0%	19	74%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	27%	36%	9%	9%	18%	11	64%
Education	0%	58%	25%	17%	0%	12	58%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	38%	46%	15%	0%	0%	13	85%
Other public services	5%	63%	26%	5%	0%	19	68%
Associations (e.g. trade assoc., union)	13%	31%	38%	6%	13%	16	44%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of the steering committee	28%	50%	17%	6%	0%	18	78%
Not member of the steering committee	10%	49%	25%	8%	8%	51	59%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Proportionally more women than men said that it had been a success. Respondents over 50 years of age were generally more positive than those who were aged 24–49 years. When the answers were analysed by occupation, a fifth of workers in non-governmental organisations and more than one-quarter of respondents who worked in the local authority social services or in the healthcare services felt that submitting proposals for improvement had not gone well. In comparison, none of those who worked in public services in ministries or local authorities were of that opinion.

From the above, it can be observed that the task of the Welfare Watch was both to analyse and advise, which is consistent with the role that the Minister defined for the Welfare Watch when it was created. The purpose of establishing the Welfare Watch was to "obtain information on the social and economic consequences of the collapse of the banks on individuals and families, obtain information on other countries' experience of recession, identify the ways the state, local authorities and NGOs have to deal with the problem and consult with representatives of public institutions, NGOs and others who could contribute their knowledge and experience. On this basis, the Welfare Watch shall make recommendations on measures to assist households and coordinate them" (Ministry of Welfare, 2009b).

The Welfare Watch could not, however, ensure that the projects would be implemented. In interviews with people from the steering committee, the impression was given that it was sometimes difficult to be in a position to come up with suggestions for improvement without being able to see that such improvements were implemented.

We could have an opinion and make suggestions, but there were no guarantees that they would be implemented. [...] I really wanted to just go in and talk to the minister face to face, say, my friend, such is the situation, as politicians what are you going to do? [a member of the steering committee].

### ***The role of the Welfare Watch in information dissemination***

A new letter of appointment from Guðbjartur Hannesson, Minister of Welfare, from 8 October 2010, stated that the steering committee should "disclose information to the government as well as the public and [shall] provide information to them in a meaningful way" (Ministry of Welfare, n.d.-a). Interviews with people from the Welfare Watch steering committee revealed that members of the group had seen it as their role to share information with the public and with the public bodies or companies who had representatives in the Welfare Watch. Thus, both the government and those public bodies who had representatives in the Welfare Watch, as well as the general public, would profit from the existence of the Watch. Although the interviewees thought that the Watch should have been more visible to the public, an example was given of how the Welfare Watch managed to reduce the negative discussion in society by sharing information about the state of affairs with the media.

I remember there was a [discussion of] an increase in the number of individuals who took their own lives and it was exaggerated in the news. When you went through the numbers, it was just not right. It was the Welfare Watch that gathered the information and presented it to the media again. It was very pleasant at this time to do this, as Iceland was in an existential crisis, and things were a little chaotic [a member of the steering committee].

Respondents discussed the importance of sharing information on the activities of the Welfare Watch to colleagues, and the obligation was on members of the Welfare Watch steering committee to inform their colleagues and clients on issues and priorities of the Welfare Watch (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a, December). There were examples where members of the steering committee shared information in meetings with colleagues, although one respondent was uncertain that it applied to everyone.

I think that in some cases, people may have been alone at the Welfare Watch, been there because of interest, but I do not know exactly how much came out of it. In some cases, you heard that people had a group inside their agencies and then, naturally, this worked [a member of the steering committee].

Similar views were reflected in the focus groups amongst people who had participated in the activities of the working groups. Mention was made that one of the objectives of the working groups had been to call people together so that they could share their experiences and learn from each other. In this way, participation in the working groups could be used to share information about the kind of work that was ongoing in different public bodies and NGOs in the field of welfare issues.

In the web survey among members of the working groups, participants were asked whether they would agree or disagree that the work of the Welfare Watch had been well promoted within Icelandic society. The response options rather disagree and disagree strongly were combined for analysis due to the small number that selected these categories. Table 10 shows that more than half of the participants agreed, but a third neither agreed nor disagreed that the work of the Welfare Watch had been well promoted within Icelandic society. Proportionally more women than men agreed with the statement, and respondents 50 years and older agreed with the statement more often than younger respondents.

**Table 10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
The work of the Welfare Watch was well promoted in Icelandic society**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly or rather disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	22%	31%	32%	15%	72	53%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	23%	23%	43%	11%	35	46%
Female	22%	38%	22%	19%	37	59%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	22%	17%	33%	28%	18	39%
50–59 years	17%	39%	36%	8%	36	56%
60–68 years	33%	28%	22%	17%	18	61%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	17%	33%	25%	25%	12	50%
Education	7%	36%	29%	29%	14	43%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	58%	8%	17%	17%	12	67%
Other public services	26%	26%	47%	0%	19	53%
Associations (e.g. trade assoc., union)	7%	47%	33%	13%	15	53%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of the steering committee	27%	33%	33%	7%	15	60%
Not a member of the steering committee	20%	31%	31%	18%	55	51%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### **The role of the Welfare Watch as an independent group**

Discussions which took place in the individual interviews with people from the steering committee on the object and purpose of the Welfare Watch revealed the view that the Welfare Watch should be an independent group. This definition was presented in a new letter of appointment on the role of the steering committee, which was released on 8 October 2010. In an interview with Guðbjartur Hannesson, he was asked about the significance of the Welfare Watch being independent. It was Guðbjartur's understanding that this meant that the Welfare Watch was not managed by ministers and that ministers should avoid influencing the work of the group. This meant that it was possible to observe the consequences of government action and indicate if not enough was being done to improve the situation of certain social groups. Three of the ministers interviewed felt that one of the strengths of the Welfare Watch was that it brought to their attention ideas on what needed to be improved in Icelandic society. Accounts from Árne Pall and Guðbjartur showed, however, that they had differing views on whether it was detrimental to the independence of the Welfare Watch that the government could ask it questions. It was Guðbjartur's opinion that he was not required to seek information from the Welfare Watch, as it was an independent group, but Árne Páll said that he had not been afraid to consult the Welfare Watch and had continued to do so after he became Minister of Economy and Commerce.

When I was trying to put in controls for the micro-loan companies [then as Minister of Economy and Commerce], I asked for information about whether it [the Welfare Watch] could obtain information about the impact of micro-loans on the more vulnerable groups within Icelandic society, share with authorities examples of such effects and advise on whether we should be looking for ways to limit these activities [Árne Páll Arnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

The ministers considered that it did not make a difference in respect of the neutrality of the Welfare Watch that the chairman and employee came from the staff of the ministry. In this regard, Guðbjartur noted that during his term, he emphasised that the proposals that came from the Welfare Watch were not discussed within closed groups within the ministry before they received general introduction. Other respondents also mentioned that the neutrality of the Welfare Watch was one of its strengths. A member of the steering committee noted that although certain issues were discussed extensively, consensus was always reached on the proposals that went to the government. It was felt that the neutrality of the Welfare Watch delivered this success because members were not politically appointed and therefore not subject to a declared policy of a political party.

People reached a consensus that would not have been possible, I think, if the members had been politically elected. They would have needed to bring in all sorts of minority opinions [a member of the steering committee].

Interviewees from the steering committee were unanimous in that the Welfare Watch had been independent in the sense that the group decided for itself what issues were discussed and how these issues were discussed. There were, however, differing opinions as to whether a group appointed by the government could be defined as independent.

I mean, this is a group appointed by the government, and that means that things are done in a certain way, rather than if it had been a spontaneous group or an NGO. Such a group cannot be completely independent, but it was quite clear that we had complete control over what we looked at and how we did it [a member of the steering committee].

Whether people chose to define the Welfare Watch as a completely independent group or not, it was pointed out that it was an advantage that the group worked at the behest of the Minister and that the chairman had ties with the ministry. Lára, Chairman of the Welfare Watch, worked in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, which later became the Ministry of Welfare, during most of the time that the first Welfare Watch was at work. When Lára resigned from the ministry in 2012, she missed being directly connected to the minister and other ministry staff on issues involving the Welfare Watch.

When I worked [in the ministry], one knew what issues were predominant, what was happening and could get hold of whoever was needed, ministers, assistants or whatever it was [Lára Björnsdóttir, former chairman of the Welfare Watch].

### ***Objectives of the working groups***

When the working groups were established at the meeting of the steering committee on 27 February 2009, the objectives of the working groups were decided. First, they had to map the situation, assess the consequences of the economic collapse on the target group and make clear what information was lacking to get a clearer picture. Second, the groups were intended to prepare a summary of what had already been done to mitigate the effects of the crisis. Third, it was agreed that each working group would recommend improvements, and finally, the recommendation was

made that the groups should at all times keep equal rights in mind and examine the effects of actions or omissions on both sexes, immigrants and other minorities (Ministry of Welfare, 27 February 2009). In this way, the steering committee defined the role of the working groups, but the members of the working groups were allowed to further decide what the objective of each group was. Judging by the words of the interviewees who participated in the focus group discussions, it was sometimes difficult to define specifically the role of each group, even though the overall aim of the working groups was clear. This was particularly relevant to the interviewees who had a seat in groups whose topics covered a wide subject range.

I strongly agree that the overall objectives were both clear, noble and very good. [... but] there was perhaps a certain insecurity or dissatisfaction within the group because we didn't really know what was expected of us, how we should deliver it and what the time limits were; yes, that is what it was like. We felt the objectives were rather vague [a member of a working group].

Another interviewee from the working group said:

It was good to have a dedicated network that meets regularly and takes the pulse of society, but what is it meant to deliver? [a member of a working group].

Although some felt that the objectives were vague, it is clear that each group had a different role to play. The web survey among the members of the working groups revealed that most agreed that the role of their working group was well defined, but 29% said the role of the group was always or almost always well defined and half of the respondents said the role of the group was usually well defined. Almost a quarter of respondents said that the role of the group was sometimes, rarely or never well defined. When the results were examined by background factors, it was revealed that employees in local authority social services and healthcare services felt more often that the role of their working group was well defined compared to those who worked in other areas (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Was the role of the working group clearly defined?**

	Always or almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom or never	Number	Always, almost always or usually
<b>Total</b>	29%	49%	13%	10%	70	77%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	32%	38%	18%	12%	34	71%
Female	25%	58%	8%	8%	36	83%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	33%	44%	11%	11%	18	78%
50–59 years	29%	49%	17%	6%	35	77%
60–68 years	24%	53%	6%	18%	17	76%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	25%	67%	0%	8%	12	92%
Education	0%	67%	20%	13%	15	67%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	27%	9%	27%	11	64%
Other public services	44%	33%	17%	6%	18	78%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	36%	50%	14%	0%	14	86%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of the steering committee	36%	64%	0%	0%	14	100%
Not a member of the steering committee	26%	44%	17%	13%	54	70%

In the survey, people were asked to identify the goals of the group to which they belonged in their own words. Table 12 shows a summary of their responses. The table shows that the group who released the report called *Recession and health* had a similar role to the *public health group*, which was established in 2010 after the former was disbanded. These groups did not work at the same time, but the group that dealt with the recession and state of health had the name *health and healthcare* and *working group on healthcare services* (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). The former is for simplicity referred to as *the working group on the recession and the state of health* here below.

From the responses of the participants, it can be seen that the objectives of the working groups were very close to those of the Welfare Watch's steering committee on the purpose behind the establishment of working groups. Respondents indicated that the role of groups had been analysing the impact of the economic collapse on the social group under review and making recommendations on how they could improve people's circumstances. This is consistent with the role of the Welfare Watch as an analyst and an adviser.



**Table 12. What were the objectives of the working group?**

Working group	Summary of responses
Children and families with children	To monitor the effects of the economic collapse on children and families with children. This means monitoring the circumstances of children in nursery and primary schools, in the social and healthcare system and in the child welfare system. The focus was directed at examining whether child services worsened due to cutbacks or savings and whether increases in various expenditures for children led to e.g. changes to their participation in sports and leisure activities and also whether they were provided with lunch in the school. Particular attention was paid to children who were in difficult circumstances prior to the recession, such as those who used the services of the Children's Psychiatric Department at the Landspítali University Hospital and the children's welfare services.
Persons at risk both before and after the crash	To monitor whether the circumstances of those living under poor conditions before the recession had worsened. Also examined was whether there had been any changes to the composition of the group, and efforts were made to come up with proposals for improvements for this group.
The recession and health	The group operated for a short period. Its object was to monitor the various effects of the recession on public health.
Youngsters and young adults	To assess the effects of the recession on young people and seek ways to strengthen education in primary and secondary schools and to reintegrate young people who were disadvantaged due to the economic collapse.
The unemployed	The goals of the group were threefold: 1) to gather information on the position of those who were unemployed, 2) to inform the authorities of the possible consequences of long-term unemployment and the manner in which unemployment could affect different groups and 3) to come up with proposals for actions to prevent the negative consequences of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment.
Financial difficulties of households	To monitor the circumstances regarding the financial difficulties of households (individuals and families), monitor the remedial measures that have been taken to help households facing payment difficulties and try to assess how far these measures have enabled households to restructure their finances. In addition, to seek to assess where the greatest difficulties of households lay at the time and to point out which problems were the most pressing to resolve with further remedies or actions by the government and/or financial undertakings.
Basic services group	To define the basic services provided by the authorities to ensure that such services are protected from cutbacks and to ensure that these services are given priority when circumstances again allow increases in public services.
Public health group	To examine the effects of the recession on the health and wellbeing of the nation. The group was intended to examine the effects of the recession on the health of individuals at different stages of life, i.e. during pregnancy, young children, school children and youngsters, employed people and the elderly. In addition, the group was to analyse who were at a disadvantage regarding healthcare services.
Group on social indicators	To develop social indicators that are a collection of statistical information, to be accessible in a single location and which are to provide an indication of the developments and changes in society. Thus, the social indicators were to be indicators of the social environment just as economic indicators are for the economic environment.
The Suðurnes Watch	To strengthen connections between professionals in the area and highlight the solutions available in the area that could be useful to those at a disadvantage after the collapse of the banks, whether such solutions were from the authorities, the municipalities or NGOs. The Suðurnes Watch was also to monitor the effects of the recession on welfare in the Suðurnes region and take mitigating measures wherever considered necessary.
The joint group of unemployed people and young people	To map the circumstances of young people, particularly in light of employment and education and to point out remedies for improvement.

Two out of every three respondents in the survey among the members of the working groups said that achieving the objectives set for the working group had gone well, but one-fifth of respondents said it had gone neither well nor poorly. Those working in NGOs or in public services felt that achieving the objectives of groups had gone better than those who worked in the local authority social services, healthcare services or in education and training (see Table 13).

**Table 13. On the whole, how well or poorly do you feel the objectives that the working group set itself were achieved?**

	Very well	Rather well	Neither well nor poorly	Rather poorly	Very poorly	Number	Very or rather well
<b>Total</b>	13%	51%	22%	7%	7%	72	64%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	15%	45%	21%	6%	12%	33	61%
Female	10%	56%	23%	8%	3%	39	67%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	13%	44%	19%	6%	19%	16	56%
50–59 years	11%	55%	21%	8%	5%	38	66%
60–68 years	17%	50%	28%	6%	0%	18	67%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	0%	50%	25%	17%	8%	12	50%
Education	0%	44%	44%	6%	6%	16	44%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	17%	50%	17%	8%	8%	12	67%
Other public services	22%	61%	11%	6%	0%	18	83%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	21%	50%	14%	0%	14%	14	71%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of the steering committee	27%	40%	33%	0%	0%	15	67%
Not a member of the steering committee	9%	56%	18%	7%	9%	55	65%

Respondents who felt that achieving the objectives set by the working group had gone poorly (14%) were asked why. The question was an open-ended question. The responses have been classified into four categories in Table 14. The most common reason given for difficulties in achieving the objectives was ineffective work practices and co-operation problems.

**Table 14. Why was it difficult to achieve the objectives that the working group set itself?**

Category	Number	Examples of comments
Ineffective work practices or co-operation difficulties	6	"Meeting chairmanship not in tune with the importance of the task. Ill prepared meetings and managers not clear about the importance of the issue at hand."
The project faded away	4	"There were few meetings and in the end no calls to meetings were sent and the project appeared to fade away".
Objectives unclear from the beginning	2	"Vague objectives and lack of time of the participants".
Lack of funding and remedies	1	"Lack of remedies, laws and regulations were not in tune with what was happening, lack of funds..."

## The Projects of the Welfare Watch

From the beginning, it was decided that the Welfare Watch should, amongst other projects, focus on the issues of families with children and of young people. The steering committee felt it was important to try to prevent young people from dropping out of school and to consider labour market measures for those who were completing their studies. When asked how they reached the decision to focus on this subject, people from the steering committee said that the appointment letter that came from the Minister had to some extent created a specific framework for the group. The first meetings of the Welfare Watch discussed which issues should be focused on, and in that discussion, it was decided to focus on the importance of learning from the experience in Finland and their economic crisis and also to look at the education, health and general welfare of children and young people, in order to prevent future problems.

Personally, I found it very positive, that there was so much focus on families with children and poverty because..., we can use Finland as an example, by not looking at it [poverty, and families], we are just creating problems for the future [a member of the steering committee].

When ministers were asked about what they thought about this approach by the Welfare Watch, they expressed great satisfaction with the choice of focus topic.

They took the children as the focus point and worked with it a great deal, and it, of course, hit close to home. I strongly agreed with it; I found it to be a very exciting approach for the Welfare Watch to examine all the issues from the impact on children in the community [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].

But despite the satisfaction with the Welfare Watch's choice of topics, the interviewees in the focus groups felt that a comprehensive policy had not been formulated for the issues that the Welfare Watch was allocated. During the first years after the economic collapse, the work of the Welfare Watch was characterised as being reactive, and one respondent pointed out that if Iceland continued to operate a Welfare Watch, its objectives needed to be part of a comprehensive strategy for welfare. That is why it seemed appropriate to pause, to redefine the role of the Welfare Watch and to commence the operation of a new Welfare Watch in 2014.

Because of the situation, the discussion was focused on the goal of responding to a situation that either had arisen or could potentially occur, while the best solution was perhaps some kind of comprehensive policy [a member of a working group].

The circumstances that the interviewees from the working group described were dealt with in various ways. Meetings were held on the situation in Icelandic society in both the steering committee and working groups, and the Welfare Watch steering committee also issued resolutions, proposals and recommendations, wrote progress reports with recommendations to the government, had studies carried out and organised meetings and forums.

## **Resolutions, proposals and recommendations**

Decisions on which recommendations and proposals should be submitted to the government and other agencies in order to improve people's conditions were made at the meetings of the steering committee. Table 15 provides a summary of resolutions, proposals and recommendations that the Welfare Watch issued in the period 2009–2013.

**Table 15. The resolutions, proposals and recommendations of the Welfare Watch**

<b>Month and year</b>	<b>Substance</b>
June 2009	Recommendation to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security to harmonise the registration of cases before Child Protection Services.
September 2009, 2010 and 2011	Recommendations to municipal authorities and school committees to ensure by any means possible and monitor that the children in their schools are provided with lunch on all school days.
December 2009	Opinion to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security of the dangers of delaying the payment of parental and childbirth leave in part as planned in the bill to amend the act.
December 2009	Recommendation to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security to not to ignore young job-seekers and to take every possible measure to ensure that these people do not become isolated in inactivity.
March 2010	Recommendation to the Municipal Executive Committee of the City of Reykjavík closely re-examine collection claims for school meals, nursery school fees and children's leisure time activities before sending such claims to collection companies.
March 2010	Municipal Child Protection Services are urged to always submit, within the prescribed timeframe, all completed forms and other information to the Government Agency for Child Protection.
April 2010	Municipalities and their Child Protection Services are urged to encourage increased discourse among their employees and elected representatives about diverse remedied to meet the needs of children and families with children.
June 2010	Appeal the members of parliament to keep the welfare of those most at risk in the forefront of their work and view public finances comprehensively and objectively in order to make sensible prioritisation possible.
October 2010 and November 2011	Appeal to the Parliamentary Budget Committee and municipal authorities to exercise caution when making decisions on cutbacks.
December 2010	Appeal to the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Economy and Commerce, Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, the Icelandic Financial Services Association, Arion Bank hf., Íslandsbanki hf., NBI Bank hf., Byr hf., Association of Icelandic Pension Funds, MP Bank, and the Housing Financing Fund for an easily understandable effective presentation of the actions taken in the wake of the statement of intent issued by the government and the
December 2010	Appeal to the Minister of Health to seek every means to ensure that children living in low-income circumstances or other difficult social circumstance receive the dental health care they require.
March 2011	Opinion to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Commerce on the harmfulness of micro-loan companies and the ministry urged to employ all means possible to prevent their operation.
November 2011	Resolution to the Minister of Welfare on the worries of the Welfare Watch regarding cutback to funding to the Government Agency for Child Protection.
November 2012	Appeal to the authorities that they create conditions that encourage companies and private persons to invest and embark on job creating projects.
January 2013	Municipalities are urged to formulate or revise their family affairs police and establish for themselves an action plan with the goal of strengthening the position of families in Iceland.
May 2013	The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Welfare are urged to finalise agreements as regards the decision on the subsidisation of dentistry services for children.

(Source: Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press)

As can be seen, the content of the letters often concerned children, families with children and young people, which was in accordance with the decision of the steering committee on the Welfare Watch's focus issues. The table also shows that most of the letters were written in the early years of the Welfare Watch. In 2009, the Welfare Watch sent four letters, and the following year, it was eight. The Welfare Watch sent fewer resolutions, proposals and recommendations in the years 2011–2013. The table also shows that every autumn, a letter was sent to the local authorities and municipal school boards asking them to ensure that children received lunch in primary schools, as well as reiterating the need to ensure that the costs posed to households due to the school attendance of children must be kept to a minimum. Interviewees from the steering committee agreed that the encouragement to local authorities to ensure school meals was the most important recommendation sent from the group. The idea behind these letters came during the information gathering on the economic recession in Finland. In Finland, the focus on providing lunch in primary schools was seen as having contributed to reducing the serious consequences of the economic recession on children. Ingibjörg Broddadóttir, employee of the Welfare Watch, said that immediately after the Watch's first recommendation to ensure that children received lunch at school, and due to the discussion on how Finland had responded to its economic crisis, the number of schools who offered children porridge in the morning had increased significantly. Ingibjörg considered this initiative to have been successful and that the local authorities had taken the conclusions into account.

The challenge to ensure children's dental health was also considered to have been effective. In May 2012, Guðbjartur Hannesson, Minister of Welfare, appointed a working group to make recommendations about dentistry for children. Just less than a year later, an agreement between the Icelandic Health Insurance and the Icelandic Dental Association on dental care for children and adolescents younger than 18 years was signed at the Ministry of Welfare (Ministry of Welfare, 2013b).

One could see completely, with just this one "concrete" example, such as with the dentistry [for children] – I mean, it is something that you can put your finger on [a member of the steering committee].

### ***Progress reports***

The steering committee released five progress reports. The first was published in March 2009 and the second in August of the same year. The third report was published in 2010, and Árni Páll, the then-Minister of Welfare, brought it before the Alþingi in the spring of 2010. The fourth report was published in June 2011 and the fifth in December 2013.

The reports discuss the status of welfare issues at the time they were issued, together with recommendations for improvement. The first report was released just a month after the steering committee held its first meeting. In the report, the steering committee recommended that progress reports should be released every three months, although this was not achieved. The principal purpose of the first report was to account for the work that the Welfare Watch had done in the short time that it had been operational. At the time, the Welfare Watch was of the opinion that the

consequences of the economic collapse had not become fully visible. 90% of the population was employed, most were paying their debts on time and the number of children in nursery schools had not decreased, to name but a few indicators. On the other hand, it was believed that more than six hundred children had parents who were both unemployed. In addition, the number of requests for assistance from the local authority social services had increased. The fact that local authorities, the state and NGOs had launched many initiatives in response to the impact of economic collapse on individuals and families in Iceland was highlighted (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a).

The second progress report from the Welfare Watch drew up a rather bleak picture of the situation within society. In that report, the Welfare Watch put forward its concerns that young people were more likely to lose their jobs than older people and that the number of long-term unemployed had increased. Local authorities' social services experienced an increase in applications for financial aid, and the workload at Child Protection Services had increased. The report also outlined the status of the projects mentioned in the government's action plan for welfare. The action plan was based to some extent on the proposals submitted by the steering committee in its first report to the Minister (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009b).

The third Welfare Watch report was released in January 2010, and Árni Páll submitted it to the Alþingi during the 138th legislative session, 2009–2010. The report contained information on the origins of the Welfare Watch, its objectives and the main issues that the Watch's steering committee and working groups looked into in 2009. There was also a summary of the proposals that the Watch had put forward in 2009, but no new ones were added in this third report. Interviewees from the steering committee said that it made a huge difference and that it had an effect that Árni Páll had submitted the report to the Alþingi.

The fourth report from the Welfare Watch noted that there was significant evidence to suggest that serious consequences of the recession had been avoided. The report recommended, however, that the situation of low-income families with children needed to be improved. Unemployment continued to be a concern for the Welfare Watch (Ministry of Welfare, 2011a). In the fifth and last progress report, it was again noted that in most areas, the serious consequences of the economic recession had been successfully avoided. In this context, it was pointed out that labour market measures for young people had been established and that the family services of the local authorities were both diverse and dynamic. However, concerns were raised about poverty amongst families with young children, the unemployment rate among foreign nationals and of people on disability pension, people who were reliant on financial aid from the local authorities and people with low incomes who had high housing costs (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

According to the interviewees, the work of preparing the progress reports was done by each group, who wrote a report on the result of its work. The steering committee presented a report to the Minister, which contained certain proposals from the working groups, which the members of the steering committee had agreed upon, together with other material from the steering committee. From the accounts of the interviewees, the subject matters addressed by the groups varied in their level of difficulty. Thus, a member of the working group intended to deal with people without work

stated that due to the nature of the subject, the group examined the impact of the economic collapse on people's position in the labour market. Conversely, the members of the working group intended to define what is considered a basic service found it harder to find an approach to the subject.

It all becomes so assessment based – where do we draw the line if we decide that basic services covers both statutory services and also some of the services that are traditionally provided [a member of a working group].

### **Assessments**

The Welfare Watch was responsible for a number of reviews and studies. Some were carried out by members of the Welfare Watch, while in other cases, outsiders were brought in to work on projects. The debate in society at the time called for specific responses, and when writing the reports, a number of questions that needed answers came up. An example was the review carried out on the number of notifications sent to the Child Protections Services, as at the start of the recession, there was a lot of debate about an increase in the number of notifications.

People wanted to blame the recession for everything, for all the poverty, all the problems and all the notifications to Child Protection Services. [...] We did not want to continue on in this alarmist way [...], instead all the proposals were to be based on knowledge that we had analysed and preferably on studies [Lára Björnsdóttir, former chairman of the Welfare Watch].

Since the establishment of the Welfare Watch in 2009 until the first Welfare Watch completed its work in 2013, seven reviews or smaller studies were carried out. In May 2009, the Welfare Watch sought information from the local authorities in Iceland on whether and how social services had become aware of the effects of the economic recession. The enquiry consisted of a few open-ended questions sent to the directors of the social services of local authorities. They felt that almost all social services had felt the consequences of the recession, as applications for financial aid had increased and more people requested social service counselling. In part, the issues were similar in nature as before, but the staff found them to be more difficult and have more complex solutions. The survey also asked which issues the Welfare Watch should focus on in their work. It was found that the wishes of social services were very much in line with the focus issues of the Watch. For example, it was mentioned that it was necessary to attend to children and families with children and the disadvantaged in society, that there should be studies available that would monitor developments in these special populations, that household finances should be kept in mind and that basic services of the welfare system should be ensured (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009d).

The aforementioned report on the increase of notifications to the Child Protection Services came out in November 2009 and was prepared by the Centre for Children and Family Research. During the assessment, statistical data was collected from the child protection committees of Reykjavik, Reykjanesbær and Árborg for the first 6 months of the years 2005 to 2009. The results showed that reports to child protection services increased by 20–32% in the first six months of

each year, except in 2008, when they decreased. The media had noted that reports to child welfare had increased in early 2009, but the author of the report showed that the increase in reporting was similar to that of the preceding years, except for 2008. There was no evidence that the increase was a result of the economic crisis (Halldór Sig. Guðmundsson, 2009).

In the summer of 2010, the Directorate of Labour set in motion a campaign for job seekers. With this opportunity, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security decided to draw up two studies at the behest of the Welfare Watch and hired three employees to work on the projects. One of the projects dealt with local authority services for children and families with children and involved the collecting of information on local authorities from the Internet. The second project was entitled *Voices of children, 2010* and was based on interviews with eight children, concerning their views on the recession and how they had experienced the discussion of the economic situation in society (Ministry of Welfare, 24 August 2010).

In the first half of 2011, a report was released entitled *Women in the Economic Crisis*. As of the first working year of the Welfare Watch, the decision was made to integrate equal rights policies throughout the work of the Watch. During the Welfare Watch working day in September 2010, the decision was made that one of the main projects of the working year should be to ensure that the policy of equal rights would be reflected in the statistics that the Welfare Watch requested. Eva Bjarnadóttir and Eygló Árnadóttir were subsequently asked to collect gender-disaggregated data from government agencies and interest groups that could reveal the impact of the crisis on the welfare of women. The report included consideration of the status of parents of young children, as paternity leave pay to fathers had decreased from the start of the recession, while at the same time payments to mothers from the Parental Leave Fund had increased. The report also contained gender-disaggregated information about household financial difficulties, as women made up the majority of those who felt they could not meet unexpected expenses and had difficulty in making ends meet. There was also a discussion about the impact of the financial crisis on the status of men and women in the labour market and people's health and figures published on gender-based violence (Eva Bjarnadóttir and Eygló Árnadóttir 2011).

In the spring of 2011, the Welfare Watch sent out questions to the child protection committees, healthcare centres and primary schools to investigate the situation of children in difficult circumstances. A year later, a summer employee was hired to analyse the results of these questions, to steer the discussion in three focus groups amongst the staff of these organisations and to take three interviews with representatives of the Single Parents' Society, the Women Of Multicultural Ethnicity Network and Icelandic Church Aid. The results of the report were that a comprehensive view of the issues faced by children and families with children was lacking, that the ability for both parents to take parental leave needed to be ensured, that independence needed to be promoted by emphasising the ability of individuals to help themselves, that co-operation between services should be encouraged and that there was a high demand for psychological and mental health services for children (Ministry of Welfare, 2011b).

In December 2012, a report was released on the causes of foreclosure sales in Suðurnes. The study was conducted at the initiative of the District Commissioner of Keflavík and was funded by



the Ministry of Welfare. The introduction to the report states that the dynamic work of the Welfare Watch was crucial to the success of the study. Lára Kristín Sturludóttir was asked to work on the study, and two university students were hired to assist her through the efforts of the Directorate of Labour to increase the number of summer jobs for students. The study covered the period 2001–2011. There was a sharp increase in foreclosure sales in 2008, and when the report came out, the rate had not decreased. However, it was noted that the foreclosure sales of apartments of individuals decreased between 2010 and 2011, whilst the number of foreclosure sales of apartments of legal entities increased (Lára Kristín Sturludóttir, 2012).

### ***Project Execution***

The tasks of the working groups on social indicators and on the Suðurnes region were later made into independent projects and therefore differed from other Welfare Watch working groups.

#### **Social indicators group**

Interviews with people from the steering committee revealed that the work on social indicators was the project that stood out. Soon after the establishment of the Welfare Watch, people found that they lacked a tool that provided quantitative information on the status of various groups and the ability to view trends over time. According to Lára, Chairman of the Welfare Watch, the group often got into trouble when an opinion or proposal was needed when information was not available about the changes that had occurred since the economic collapse. For example, there was no available information in one place about the changes that had taken place in the number of people with low incomes, household debt, the status of the rental market and the number of school drop-outs. The Welfare Watch called together a group of experts to work on making social indicators. A working group on social indicators was approved at a meeting of the steering committee in March 2009 after research advisors attended the meeting of the group (Ministry of Welfare, 6 March 2009 and 13 March 2009). The chairman of the group came from the ranks of the steering committee and the experts from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security. According to interviewees from the steering committee, the establishment of the social indicators was meant to end speculation about whether changes in the positions of certain groups were a result of the recession or not.

Getting the social indicators changed our work. We were able to get information about the situation as current at any time and could base our work on it [a member of the steering committee].

With the development of these social indicators, the Welfare Watch departed to some extent from its role as an analyst and an advisor. The Welfare Watch was not generally designed to ensure project implementation, but people from the steering committee played an important role in establishing the social indicators.

In the autumn of 2010, the Welfare Watch steering committee approved the formation of six working groups with representatives from organisations that work with statistics. These groups met regularly and worked on the development of social indicators. There was a group on performance

indicators (1), which analysed the situation of those dependant on a pension or local authority financial aid; a group on social and educational indicators (2), whose analysis included number of school drop-outs and frequency of offences; a group of indicators on household finance (3), analysing the debt, debt service and household financial difficulties; a group on health indicators (4), which identified the factors that affect the health of the nation; a group of indicators on the labour market (5), which analysed the status and composition of those who were unemployed; and finally, a demography group (6), who provided statistical information that could be useful to the work of other groups. Parallel to the establishment of the working groups, it was decided to convene a group of representatives from the university who were to scrutinise the work of the working groups and make suggestions on how best to set out the data and define it (Welfare Watch, 2009a).

In February 2012, the social indicators were issued for the first time. The report contained statistical information on demographics, equality, sustainability, health and solidarity. In its first report, the Welfare Watch placed emphasis on ensuring that the work on the development and maintenance of these social indicators would be continued. It was deemed important to decide which organisation or ministry should be responsible for the supervision and storage of the social indicators, in order to ensure that they were updated regularly (Welfare Watch, 2012a). The existence of the social indicators was secured in December 2012, when the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Finance and Economics and Statistics Iceland signed an agreement to the effect that Statistics Iceland would be in charge of the data collection and processing of the data for social indicators and hired an expert for the implementation of the project. The second edition of the social indicators was prepared by Statistics Iceland for the Ministry of Welfare and was released in October 2013 (Statistics Iceland, 2013).

In the opinion of Guðbjartur Hannesson, the former Minister of Welfare, the social indicators were still not as firmly established as he had hoped.

I hope that the project will continue as we planned it [...] that certain scales will be created, and in that way, certain social factors will be followed and that every three months or every six months [...] social indicators are released, which show what the trend is. Social indicators should literally follow the economic statistics because economic statistics are always released for all kinds of things but are a very limited measure of society [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].

### **The Suðurnes Watch**

The establishment of the Suðurnes Watch was another example of a project launched by the Welfare Watch. In many cases, the Suðurnes region was worse off than any other region soon after the economic collapse. Unemployment in the area was high compared to other parts of the country, the debt problem was great and level of education was low. At a meeting of the representatives of organisations and public bodies in Suðurnes on 13 October 2010, a request was submitted that the Welfare Watch assist organisations and public bodies in Suðurnes to work together on urgent welfare issues, in light of the serious recession and to ensure the welfare of the population. Two months later, a collaborative group had been created to address welfare issues

in Suðurnes. The government approved the proposals of the Welfare Watch to provide funding for an employee for a three-year project, and Lovísa Lilliendahl was hired. The decision was made that Ingibjörg Broddadóttir would be the chairman of the group. The group was composed of representatives from all municipalities in the Southern peninsula (Reykjanesbær, Grindavík, Garður, Sandgerði and Vogar) and principal service agencies. The objective of the group was to promote municipal co-operation in the field of welfare issues. The Suðurnes Watch operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare until the end of 2013, and the composition of the Watch remained mainly the same during the time it was operational, although several members did join the group after it was established (Ministry of Welfare, 2011a).

The first progress report of the Suðurnes Watch was released in June 2011. This was an analysis of the situation in the Suðurnes region, and the report included information about unemployment, financial difficulties and bankruptcy of companies in the area, as well as a discussion on the major actions that had been taken in the field of employment, education and welfare (The Welfare Watch, 2011a). The second progress report was released in June 2012. The report noted that the formal co-operation between local authorities in the field of welfare had increased with the establishment of the Suðurnes Watch. There were a number of positive signs in the development of employment and welfare in the region. For example, it was felt that a project aimed to promote education had performed well, and an Industrial Regional Development Agency had been established and was involved in diverse projects in the field of employment and regional development. Unemployment had fallen since the first progress report had been written. Unemployment, however, was still highest in Suðurnes (The Welfare Watch, 2012b). The third and last progress report from the Suðurnes Watch, released in December 2013, included a discussion to the effect that the situation in the region had improved. This was especially true in the field of employment, as unemployment had been substantially reduced since the establishment of the Suðurnes Watch. In addition, the average performance on standardised tests in primary schools in Reykjanesbær, Garður and Sandgerði in autumn 2013 were the best ever. However, a number of households in Suðurnes were still defaulting on payments, and the number of foreclosure sales was still increasing. The cost of local authority financial aid had also increased, as was the case elsewhere in the country (The Welfare Watch, 2013).

The Suðurnes Watch was responsible for a number of projects during the period in which it was operational, including an early alert project on domestic violence, which began in 2011. In connection with the project, a booklet on domestic violence was released and was distributed to all houses in Suðurnes, seminars on domestic violence were held and the police and social services in the region began a special collaboration. The collaboration involved, amongst other things, improving investigations into domestic violence, to firmly address cases from the beginning, to help victims and perpetrators effectively by calling out social service employees to the scene and to better utilise the resources of restraining orders and eviction (The Welfare Watch, 2013). According to the responses of the participants in the working groups to an open-ended question in a web survey, the pilot project on domestic violence in Suðurnes and the collaboration between

the police, social services and child welfare was meant to last one year, but it subsequently became recognised practice in the region.

### **Grant Provisions**

One of the proposals in the committee's first progress report in March 2009 was the establishment of a counterbalance fund that had the role of providing funds for necessary welfare research, co-ordinating projects on behalf of third parties and affiliates, supporting staff working with those worst affected by the recession, creating initiatives for specific groups that the economy has effected badly and other necessary work. At the meeting of the steering committee on 27 March 2009, the Chairman of the Welfare Watch confirmed that counterbalance fund would be created. Subsequently, the chairman of the Welfare Watch and its 2 employees put together the rules of the fund. The rules were submitted to the steering committee at a meeting on 26 June 2009, and it was also agreed that the Chairman of the Welfare Watch and its employees would manage the fund with representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Red Cross in a steering committee. In the rules of the fund, it was noted that the fund was intended to support actions that could reduce the consequences of the economic recession for the people of Iceland. The plan was to spend 75% of the grant fund on initiatives, support staff within welfare services, welfare research and the work on social indicators, while a quarter of the amount was to be used to co-ordinate projects run by the third sector and for other necessary projects. The initial contribution to the fund was ISK 30 million, and it was to be kept by the Treasury under the oversight of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security (Ministry of Welfare, 26 June 2009).

Applications for grants from the fund were requested in early 2010. The meeting of the steering committee on 27 April 2010 revealed that 45 applications had been received and that a working group had been established to prepare proposals for allocation. The decision was made to support 15 projects for a total of ISK 13 million (Ministry of Welfare, 27 April 2010). This was the only allocation from the Counterbalance Fund, and the Welfare Watch did not advertise for further applications to the fund. In an interview with Lára, Chairman of the Welfare Watch, and Ingibjörg, employee at the Watch, they were asked why there had only been one allocation. They responded that the projects that applied for funding were not consistent with the ideas of the steering committee as regards the purpose of the fund. As a result, the decision was made to use the funds that the government had granted, to pay for reviews. In this way, it was possible to finance studies on the impact of the crisis on women and on the increased notifications to Child Protection Services.

### ***Presentations and information disclosure***

When the Welfare Watch was established, a website was opened on the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security homepage, where information could be found on the work of the steering committee, government actions and where people could find various information. In the first progress report from the Welfare Watch, it was noted that in the short time that the site had been opened to the public, the most frequently opened link referred to where people could seek information on employment issues, housing issues, payment difficulties, immigration issues, children and families with children, the local authority social services and information on relocating to Scandinavia (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a).

At the second meeting of the Welfare Watch steering committee, the importance of the media in the debate on welfare was discussed. The media plays an important role in all debate, and negative discussion was considered to potentially have a major impact on children, young people and vulnerable people in society. There was a discussion on whether the steering committee could be used to direct media speculation in a positive direction, as there had been examples of misleading news, which could potentially cause people anguish. At the meeting, it was agreed that one of the employees of the Welfare Watch would contact the news channels (Ministry of Welfare, 27 February 2009). At a meeting of the steering committee two weeks later, it was reported that a meeting with the media had been held on 9 March and the establishment of a collaboration between the Welfare Watch and the media had been agreed (Ministry of Welfare, 13 March 2009). The Chairman of the Welfare Watch stated that it had been decided not to try and establish this collaboration after their meeting with the media, but that the public relations representative of the Ministry of Welfare was invited to all meetings of the Watch and would take care of all news distribution.

In addition to directing matters to the media, the Welfare Watch steering committee emphasised the promotion of the important issues related to the economic recession that the Watch was dealing with, by holding meetings and seminars. Table 16 is a summary of the seminars and meetings organised by the Welfare Watch. At these meetings, external parties were asked to give presentations that could shed light on the situation of different social groups in society.

**Table 16. Symposiums organised by the Welfare Watch**

<i>Month and year</i>	<i>Substance</i>
November 2009	Breakfast meeting on the financial position of households
November 2009	Workshop on employment issues
February 2010	Discussion and information meeting on the welfare and health of children during times of economic difficulties
November 2010	Help to self-help: Consultative day on the co-operation of public bodies and the "third sector" (NGOs)
January 2014	Conference on the diversity of family forms

(Source: Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press)

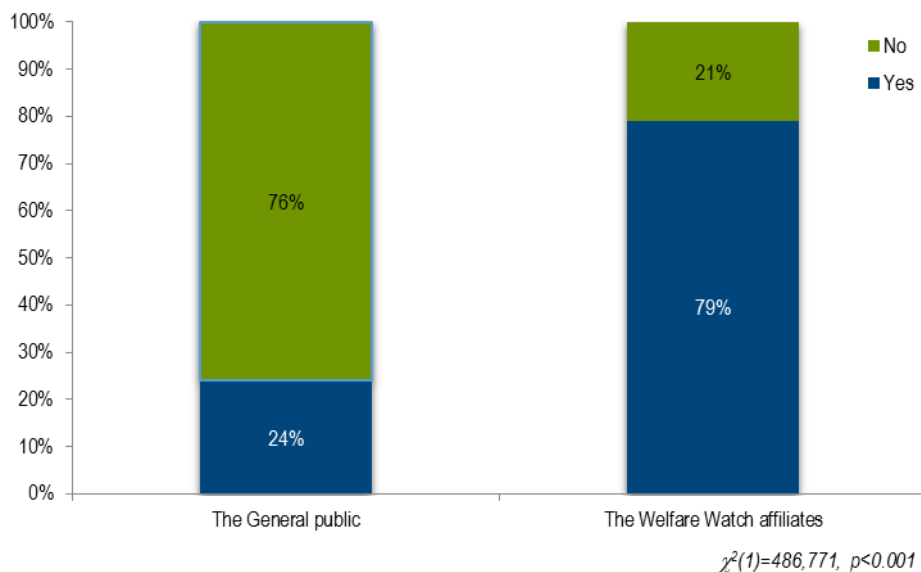
Members of the steering committee were also responsible for introducing material relevant to the Welfare Watch at meetings and conferences organised by others, both in Iceland and abroad. In this way, Lára, the Chairman of the Watch, presented, for example, information on the activities of the Watch at the annual meetings of ASI, at seminars held by institutions and faculties of the University of Iceland, at meetings with representatives of the local authorities, at a seminar for priests, and e.g., Nordic guests and partners at the Nordic Council of Ministers (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). The interviewees from the steering committee also found considerable interest in the Watch from abroad. According to Lára, Chairman of the Welfare Watch, and Ingibjörg, an employee of the Watch, other countries were interested in the fact that in Iceland, there was a group of people from different backgrounds who had the aim to come up with ideas for the government. Lára was asked to give a presentation on the activities of the Welfare Watch at international meetings and conferences held in Iceland. She also travelled to France, Finland and Sweden to promote the Welfare Watch and subjects related to it. Ingibjörg, an employee of the Watch went to Ireland to introduce the Welfare Watch, at an international conference there. Many foreign visitors and groups also came and asked for an introduction. Despite the tasks of the Welfare Watch being presented in this way, one respondent from the steering committee said that they would have liked to create an additional forum for debate on the situation in Iceland.

It was often discussed that the Welfare Watch could possibly have held more seminars and meetings in order to further the discussion [a member of the steering committee].

From the above, it is clear that the Welfare Watch employed various methods to publicise its activities and the issues that the Welfare Watch took on, as well as created dialogue and sought knowledge on the status of welfare issues. In light of this, it was interesting to explore how visible the Welfare Watch was to the public and to people who worked within organisations that were represented in the Welfare Watch. In a survey of the public and Welfare Watch affiliates, people were asked whether they had heard of the Welfare Watch.

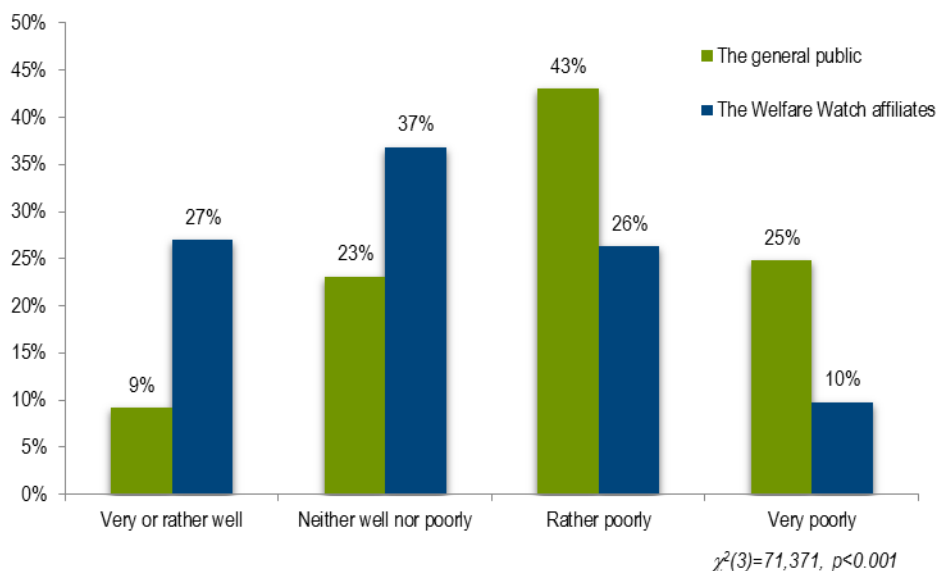
There were large differences in the responses, depending on the group to which the respondents belonged. One-quarter of those who answered the survey among the general public had heard about the Welfare Watch, while the same was true of almost 80% of those who belonged

to the group of affiliates (see Figure 2). A background analysis of the responses to the question may be found in Table i in Annexes 1 and 2 (Annex 1 for the public and Annex 2 for affiliates).



**Figure 2. Have you heard about the Welfare Watch? - Comparison of the responses from affiliates and the general public**

Respondents who had heard of the Welfare Watch were asked how well or poorly they knew about its work. Figure 3 shows that more than a quarter of those who worked within organisations that were represented in the Welfare Watch (affiliates) knew the work of the Welfare Watch well, compared to 9% of the public. About 36% of affiliates said they knew little of the work of the Welfare Watch, compared with 68% of the public. Nearly 40% of affiliates said they knew neither well nor poorly the work of the Watch, compared with about a quarter of the public. A background analysis of the responses to the question may be found in Table ii in Annexes 1 and 2.



**Figure 3. How familiar or unfamiliar are you with the work of the Welfare Watch? – Comparison of the responses from affiliates and the general public**

## Working methods and management of the steering committee

### **Steering committee meetings**

The meetings of the Welfare Watch steering committee were used to discuss the activities of the working groups, to present the work performed at the workplaces of the group's members and to gain insight and expertise from individuals outside the Welfare Watch. Meetings were held fortnightly, for two hours at a time, and in addition to regular meetings, the steering committee held a longer meeting in the autumn to discuss specifically the groups' procedures. In interviews with members of the steering committee, people were asked to express their views on the frequency of the meetings. Interviewees agreed that there was a need to meet frequently, especially in the beginning of the economic crisis, when a number of important Welfare Watch issues needed to be discussed.

We felt it was necessary to do it this way at that time. We were taking on situations as they were at any given time because there was so much going on during the first few months after the economic collapse [a member of the steering committee].

In addition, it was remarked that by meeting on a regular basis, a certain kind of continuity was created.

There wasn't such a long time between meetings that you had to begin by reviewing everything; therefore I think it was definitely necessary [a member of the steering committee].

The chairman and employees of the Watch prepared the agenda for each meeting, and then the chairman called the meeting. From the beginning, the focus was on keeping good records of what took place at meetings, and the meeting minutes and presentations of guests were made available online so that they could be used by the working groups to write reports. The role of the chairman



also entailed managing the steering committee's meetings. Mention was made in interviews with people from the steering committee that at times, the management of meetings had not been good enough. On occasion, the agenda was too long and the meetings often dragged on. Respondents from the steering committee noted that excessively long meetings of the steering committee could get in the way of members' other work related activities and that too long of an agenda might also prevent material presented by attendees to the steering committee from being utilised as it should. This was especially the case at the beginning, just after the Watch had been established. Sometimes guests had a very short time and there was little room for discussion. Interviewees from the steering committee said that the agenda had to be long because the debate that took place in the steering committee called for large amounts of information, particularly at the beginning of the crisis. The Watch based its proposals on the knowledge, and often the results of research, that was being presented at their meetings.

Once again, I think in the beginning we just wanted to know all, to have our finger on the pulse of everything [a member of the steering committee].

This changed over time, however, as the group agreed it would be better to have fewer guests at the Watch's meetings and have more time for discussion. Also considered was that meeting agenda should not be so extensive as to prevent suggestions for issues that were thought to be important to discuss at the Welfare Watch.

### ***Democratic working practices***

According to interviewees, the Welfare Watch insisted on democratic working practices. This meant that only recommendations and resolutions that all the members of the steering committee approved could be submitted. Interviewees from the steering committee were asked how this arrangement unfolded. From their accounts, there was an informal democracy. The group did not vote on whether a proposal should go to the government, but rather had the opportunity to provide comments and amendments before the proposals were presented in a report that was submitted to the government.

It was agreed that it was this group that would complete the work and then send it out, and then you had time to provide comments or anything. Therefore, I don't think there was ever a need for a vote [a member of the steering committee].

Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare, felt that this emphasis on democratic working practices was one of the strengths of the Watch, as it urged people to come to a consensus.

Democratic practices were also used when subjects were selected for the Watch, as the members of the steering committee would generally reach their own conclusions as to which matters needed attention. The precedent was set at the first meeting of Welfare Watch, on 20 February 2009, where the chairman and the Watch's employees asked all representatives to identify which issues they felt were most important for the Welfare Watch to focus on. After this first meeting, issues were often selected based on the debate in society at any time.

It was not necessarily the chairman who said, "Now we will look at this, and it will be worked like this." It was a very dynamic and broad steering committee who came up with a number of suggestions about what would be focused on at any given time [a member of the steering committee].

The decision about which guests to invite to the Welfare Watch steering committee meetings was also often taken in the light of the debate that took place in the group. Often, the members of the steering committee themselves requested people to hold presentations at the Watch's meetings, sometimes the chairman of the Watch invited guests and there were also examples of people that were not part of the committee who asked to take part in the meetings in order to provide information to members. Although the need for certain information and education usually came from members of the steering committee, respondents mentioned that occasionally, outside participants held presentations on a subject that they felt was not relevant to the Welfare Watch. In this context, for example, a debate on surrogacy, though important, should not have been taken up by the Welfare Watch, where it was intended to discuss the situation of vulnerable groups.

But of course, there were some issues that came up in a meeting that perhaps should have been discussed elsewhere [a member of the steering committee].

### ***Management***

From the above, it can be concluded that the role of the Chairman of the Steering Committee was to bring the group together and keep track of its work, rather than assigning specific projects. The chairman presided over the meetings and represented the Watch. Interviewees from the steering committee were generally satisfied with how the Watch was managed. Interviewees were quoted as saying that both Lára and Ingibjörg had extensive knowledge, and members of the committee felt it was beneficial to approach them when questions arose. It was also mentioned that the Chairman of the Watch had been flexible and allowed the Watch to develop with the people in it.

She had not formed an opinion on how this should look [...]. She was great as chairman because of this [a member of the steering committee].

The three ministers were also very pleased with the work of the Watch's management, and according to Guðbjartur, it was at his request that Lára continued as Chairman of the Welfare Watch after she left the Ministry of Welfare.

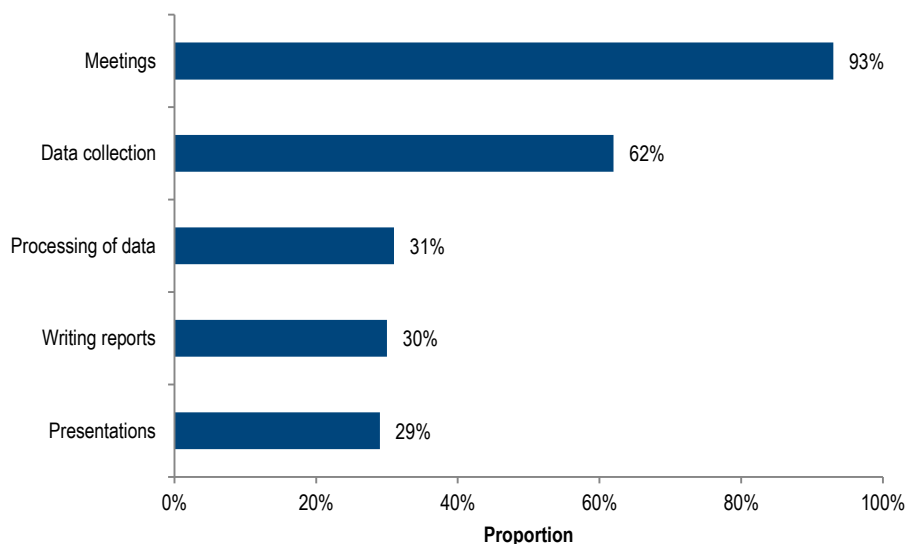
When interviewees from the steering committee were consulted on whether something could have been done better by the management of the Watch, one recipient from the steering committee said they would have liked to have more support from the ministry with writing reports. It was her belief that there was a lot of work behind the reports, and much of the work involved searching for information.

There was so much chaos in society, which is why the subject matter was so broad. What could have been done differently was that there could have been more support to the groups from the ministry, for help with writing reports and other such things, as this was of course, unpaid work, just completely on top of all other work [a member of the steering committee].

## Working group methods and management

### **Work contribution**

The work contribution of working group members included attending meetings, collecting data and sources, drafting reports and giving presentations. In response to an online survey about their role and contribution within the groups, 93% of working group respondents indicated that their role consisted either to a considerable extent or to some extent of attending meetings. Collecting data and sources was another major part; 62% of respondents indicated that their role consisted either to a considerable extent or to some extent of this type of work. Some 31% indicated that they had been involved to a considerable extent or to some extent in data processing, while 30% had been involved to a considerable extent or to some extent in drafting reports. Finally, 29% of respondents indicated that giving presentations had been a major or quite major part of their work (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. To what extent did your involvement in the working groups consist of...?**

Working group members were asked whether they would have liked for their group to meet more or less often than it did. A majority, 63%, were satisfied with the regularity of meetings. 30% would have liked more frequent meetings and 7%, less frequent (see Table 17).

**Table 17. Would you have liked for your working group to meet more or less often than it did?**

	Much more often	Slightly more often	Neither more of less often	Much more or slightly more seldom	Number	Much more or slightly more often
<b>Total</b>	8%	21%	63%	7%	71	30%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	11%	26%	54%	9%	35	37%
Female	6%	17%	72%	6%	36	22%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	6%	17%	72%	6%	18	22%
50–59 years	8%	22%	58%	11%	36	31%
60–68 years	12%	24%	65%	0%	17	35%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	9%	27%	45%	18%	11	36%
Education	13%	27%	53%	7%	15	40%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	27%	27%	45%	0%	11	55%
Other public services	0%	11%	79%	11%	19	11%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	0%	20%	80%	0%	15	20%
<b>Membership of the Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of the steering committee	0%	21%	79%	0%	14	21%
Not a member of the steering committee	9%	22%	61%	7%	54	31%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### **Allocation of responsibilities and organisation**

Responsibilities were allocated informally, with members of working groups taking on tasks themselves rather than having them allocated centrally. Over half (57%) of the working group survey respondents were satisfied with how members allocated themselves tasks. Just under a third were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the allocation of responsibilities. Women were more satisfied with the allocation of responsibilities within the group than men. People working in NGOs and municipal social services or in health services were generally more dissatisfied with the allocation of responsibilities than others (see Table 18).

**Table 18. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how responsibilities were allocated within your working group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	18%	39%	31%	13%	72	57%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	14%	34%	31%	20%	35	49%
Female	22%	43%	30%	5%	37	65%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	22%	28%	22%	28%	18	50%
50–59 years	19%	43%	27%	11%	37	62%
60–68 years	12%	41%	47%	0%	17	53%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	8%	42%	33%	17%	12	50%
Education	7%	47%	33%	13%	15	53%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	18%	45%	27%	9%	11	64%
Other public services	26%	42%	26%	5%	19	68%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	27%	20%	33%	20%	15	47%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	43%	21%	36%	0%	14	64%
Not a member of steering committee	13%	45%	27%	16%	56	57%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

From discussions in focus groups among the members of the working groups, it emerged that some felt that the division of tasks had been unclear. There was also a suggestion that it would have been better to split up the groups into smaller groups to discuss specific issues. This would have saved discussion time and improved the organisation of the groups' work. As well as a wish for clearer debate within working groups, there was a suggestion that workloads had not been evenly shared, owing to a lack of strong management.

There was no clear management. It was very easy for people just to take charge of the group's work and make decisions. As indicated, everybody was extremely busy and had very little time [...] so if somebody took the initiative [...] and drafted a report, everybody [would] be very happy [a member of a working group].

Stronger management, therefore, was considered something that would have made the working groups more effective. Proof that such was needed can be inferred from the declarations of working group interviewees, who described how fatigue began to be felt among the members of the working groups as their work progressed. The same viewpoint emerged from interviewees who were members of the Welfare Watch steering committee and also chaired a working group.

The last report, for instance, had a very difficult birth. At that time, I was still in charge of the group and it was very difficult to convene the members. People seemed somehow to have had enough of all the work and no longer wished to do it [a member of the steering committee].

Focus group discussions also revealed that good management would have made it possible to better define each member's area of work. One member indicated that too much time had gone into explaining and discussing what each person's role could possibly be. Working group members














were asked in an online survey whether it was clear what had been expected of everybody in the working group. Some 69% of respondents felt that it had always or most often been clear. A third of respondents felt that it had sometimes, rarely or never been clear what had been expected of them in the working group. People from NGOs or in public service were more inclined to say that their role was clear than other respondents were. Those who were also members of the steering committee felt that it was clearer what was expected of them than those who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 19).

**Table 19. Was it clear what was expected of you in the working group?**

	Always or almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Number	Always, almost always or usually
<b>Total</b>	31%	38%	18%	7%	6%	71	69%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	29%	35%	18%	9%	9%	34	65%
Female	32%	41%	19%	5%	3%	37	73%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	26%	37%	11%	21%	5%	19	63%
50–59 years	40%	31%	20%	0%	9%	35	71%
60–68 years	18%	53%	24%	6%	0%	17	71%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	17%	42%	25%	17%	0%	12	58%
Education	7%	53%	27%	0%	13%	15	60%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	36%	9%	18%	0%	11	73%
Other public services	56%	22%	11%	6%	6%	18	78%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	33%	40%	20%	0%	7%	15	73%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	36%	43%	21%	0%	0%	14	79%
Not a member of steering committee	30%	37%	19%	9%	6%	54	67%

As regards the organisation of working group tasks, it emerged that some two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with how things were organised, while 17% were dissatisfied. Participation in the steering committee was a factor here, with those sitting on the steering committee being generally more satisfied with how work was organised than those who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 20).

**Table 20. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how the working group's tasks were organised?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	21%	42%	21%	17%	72	 63%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	23%	40%	17%	20%	35	 63%
Female	19%	43%	24%	14%	37	 62%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	28%	28%	17%	28%	18	 56%
50–59 years	16%	49%	22%	14%	37	 65%
60–68 years	24%	41%	24%	12%	17	 65%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	8%	42%	17%	33%	12	 50%
Education	20%	33%	27%	20%	15	 53%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	27%	27%	27%	18%	11	 55%
Other public services	32%	47%	16%	5%	19	 79%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	13%	53%	20%	13%	15	 67%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	29%	57%	14%	0%	14	 86%
Not a member of steering committee	20%	39%	20%	21%	56	 59%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Survey respondents were also asked an open-ended question on whether they would have liked to have the organisation and procedures of the group be any different. Table 21 shows a summary of their comments. The table shows that a significant number would have liked to have seen things organised differently. Most of those expressing an opinion on how organisation and procedures could have been improved said that work could have been more targeted and the allocation of responsibilities clearer.














**Table 21. As regards the organisation and procedures of your working group, was there anything that you would have liked to see done differently?**

Category	Number	Examples of comments
Would not have had it any different	10	"Would not have had it any different."
More focused work and clearer division of tasks	12	"Working procedures were unclear and there was little flow of information. This requires planning ahead, having clear goals, assigning tasks, organising the arrangement of meetings and the goals of each meeting, increase collaboration and seek information from a greater number of parties than the very few who attended. Connect much better with other groups and improve information sharing between them."
Clearer goals	8	"The role and object of the group could have been better defined and dialogue with the steering committee was lacking. The position of each member could have been better explained, and where each person stood with regard to possible proposal preparation and development of remedies. Coordination was missing in some fields and the general knowledge of the role of members of the group was not good enough."
Group members not all equally active	3	"The contribution of group members to the work varied, should have been more equal."
Poor attendance to meetings	2	"Attendance to meetings was not even enough and a great deal of time was spent on repeatedly informing others what had been done."
Meetings called too seldom	2	"Call more meetings."
Timeframe too narrow	8	"That this project had been given more time."
Other aspects mentioned	8	"Get someone who can manage reporting, etc., perhaps from the ministry."

Working group members were asked in an online survey how satisfied or dissatisfied they were on the whole with the work of the working group they had been in. A majority, i.e. two-thirds, said that they were satisfied, 22% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 14% were dissatisfied. One-fifth of men were dissatisfied with the work of their working group, as compared to just 8% of women. Those who were engaged in public services in ministries and those working for local authorities were usually more satisfied on the whole with the work of their working group than those who worked elsewhere. Nobody sitting on the steering committee expressed dissatisfaction with working group efforts (see Table 22).



**Table 22. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with working group efforts?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	21%	43%	22%	14%	72	 64%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	23%	37%	20%	20%	35	 60%
Female	19%	49%	24%	8%	37	 68%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	28%	22%	33%	17%	18	 50%
50–59 years	16%	54%	16%	14%	37	 70%
60–68 years	24%	41%	24%	12%	17	 65%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	8%	50%	25%	17%	12	 58%
Education	13%	47%	27%	13%	15	 60%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	18%	18%	27%	11	 55%
Other public services	37%	42%	16%	5%	19	 79%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	7%	53%	27%	13%	15	 60%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	21%	50%	29%	0%	14	 71%
Not a member of steering committee	21%	43%	18%	18%	56	 64%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### Task prioritisation

According to focus group interviewees who had taken part in a working group, it was sometimes difficult to delimit the discussion topics for each group and to prioritise tasks, as in some cases, the material in question was extensive. One interviewee from the working group on youth and young people indicated, for instance, that the notion of “young people” was wide-ranging and could mean children, teenagers or young parents, and working group discussions could therefore end up getting out of hand. Working group members were also concerned that one group might be discussing issues that another was expected to be discussing. For instance, the working group on children and families with children spent a lot of time discussing when a child stopped being a child, as the group wanted to be sure that it did not encroach on the remit of the group discussing youth and young people.

Working group members were asked in an online survey how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with how tasks had been prioritised within the group. A total of 61% of respondents said they were satisfied, 27% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 11% dissatisfied. Women were generally more satisfied than men, and respondents in the 50–59 age range were more satisfied than other age groups. Those employed in education and training and in NGOs were more satisfied than those working in other areas (see Table 23).

**Table 23. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how tasks were prioritised within your working group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	16%	46%	27%	11%	70	61%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	14%	37%	31%	17%	35	51%
Female	17%	54%	23%	6%	35	71%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	22%	28%	28%	22%	18	50%
50–59 years	14%	57%	19%	11%	37	70%
60–68 years	13%	40%	47%	0%	15	53%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	8%	42%	25%	25%	12	50%
Education	7%	64%	21%	7%	14	71%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	20%	30%	30%	20%	10	50%
Other public services	32%	32%	32%	5%	19	63%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	7%	60%	27%	7%	15	67%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	21%	50%	21%	7%	14	71%
Not a member of steering committee	15%	46%	26%	13%	54	61%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### Democratic working practices














As with the steering committee, working groups focused on reaching a consensus on the proposals put forward in the groups' reports. Interviewees from the working groups felt that this had been difficult, as the groups contained people from so many different walks of life. For instance, an interviewee from Reykjavik City Council stated that it had been difficult for them to subscribe to measures to be taken by local authorities at the same time as the institution they worked at was undertaking streamlining measures or formulating policies in specific matters. This individual indicated that this had been solved by discussing the issues in question and that the group had been able to reach a joint conclusion. Interviews revealed one case where the democratic procedures used had prevented one matter from being resolved. The working groups on young people's issues considered it important to increase the opportunities of young people who had dropped out of school, to take up studies again. Kópavogur College offers a course in food processing and was keen to offer special opportunities for people who had dropped out of school. Problems with this idea emerged, however, as the school had difficulty entering into work-training contracts with companies in the industry. The school therefore applied for permission to act as

trainer itself and send students on external training placements for a few months instead of bringing in a trainer from the industry to teach the students for two years. This application was rejected, a decision criticised by some in the working group. One member could not agree due to a conflict of interests, and work on developing this measure was stopped.

## Management

Interviewees from the Welfare Watch steering committee and the working groups indicated that working methods had been similar to those in the steering committee. The chair ran and convened the group, but in every other respect, things were done by team work, with the group deciding collectively what material was worth examining. The online survey among working group members contained two questions on respondents' attitudes towards the chairpersons of the working groups. Table 24 shows that four-fifths of respondents felt that the role of the chairperson was always or usually clear. Those working in municipal social services or healthcare services or in NGOs felt that the role of the chairperson was clear to a greater extent than those working elsewhere.

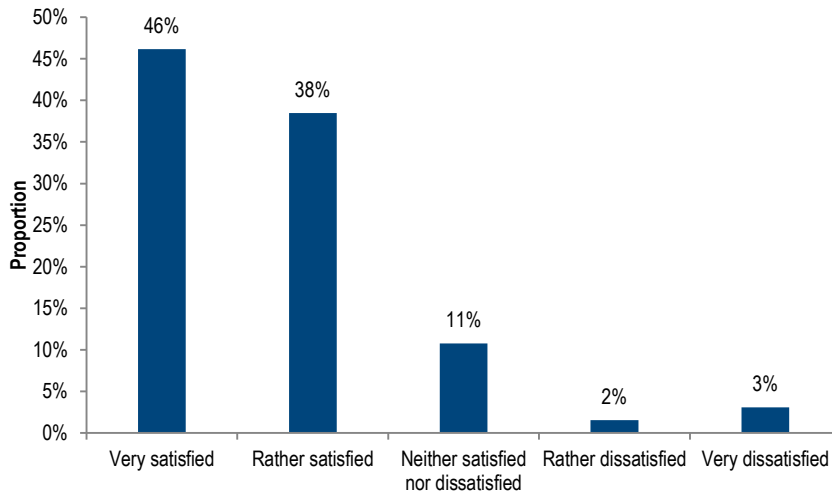
**Table 24. Was the role of the chairperson of the working group clear?**

	Always or almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom or never	Number	Always, almost always or usually
<b>Total</b>	42%	37%	11%	10%	62	 79%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	37%	40%	10%	13%	30	 77%
Female	47%	34%	13%	6%	32	 81%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	35%	47%	6%	12%	17	 82%
50–59 years	47%	33%	13%	7%	30	 80%
60–68 years	40%	33%	13%	13%	15	 73%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	55%	36%	0%	9%	11	 91%
Education	27%	47%	27%	0%	15	 73%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	40%	30%	0%	30%	10	 70%
Other public services	47%	29%	18%	6%	17	 76%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	44%	44%	0%	11%	9	 89%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	50%	50%	0%	0%	8	 100%
Not a member of steering committee	42%	34%	13%	11%	53	 75%

The chairmen of the working groups did not reply to this question.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

A considerable majority, i.e. 85%, of respondents were satisfied with communications with the chairperson of their working group, while 5% were dissatisfied (see Figure 5 and Table 25). Given the very low number of “dissatisfied” replies, these reply options were merged with those replying “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” for the purposes of the background analysis.



**Figure 5. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with communication with the chairperson of the working group? – Frequency**

Respondents working in social organisations were more dissatisfied with communication with the chairperson of the working group than those working in other areas (see Table 25).

**Table 25. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with communication with the chairperson of the working group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither/nor, very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	46%	38%	15%	65	85%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	35%	48%	16%	31	84%
Female	56%	29%	15%	34	85%
<b>Age</b>					
24–49 years	50%	28%	22%	18	78%
50–59 years	50%	34%	16%	32	84%
60–68 years	33%	60%	7%	15	93%
<b>Field of employment</b>					
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	55%	36%	9%	11	91%
Education	40%	47%	13%	15	87%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	30%	60%	10%	10	90%
Other public services	68%	21%	11%	19	89%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	20%	40%	40%	10	60%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>					
Member of steering committee	63%	38%	0%	8	100%
Not a member of steering committee	45%	38%	18%	56	82%

The chairmen of the working groups did not answer this question.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

## Communication and information provision within the Welfare Watch

### ***Communications in the steering committee***

Interviews with members of the steering committee included discussions on co-operation with others in the group. Interviewees revealed that, while heated debates on individual matters were frequent, the group had worked together well. In this connection, it was an important factor that the Welfare Watch was working towards a common goal.

From the very first meeting, everybody agreed that the main objective was to protect welfare [Lára Björnsdóttir, former Head of the Welfare Watch].

It should be borne in mind that members of the steering committee had different professional focuses, but Lára indicates that “people were not necessarily just looking after their own pet projects”. Instead, people not only gave an account of what they thought the important points were, but also listened to other people’s points of view. For instance, the representative of the Organisation of Disabled in Iceland spoke of the difficult situation of people on disability pension, and the representative of the National Association of Senior Citizens spoke about the position of elderly people. They did so without arguing with other members of the steering committee that it was more important to focus on the welfare of these groups rather than on other vulnerable groups in society. Interviewees said that mutual respect had reigned at steering committee meetings.

People felt important in these meetings, and I felt that the meetings were all – what’s the word? – that great respect was shown for all the participants [a member of the steering committee].

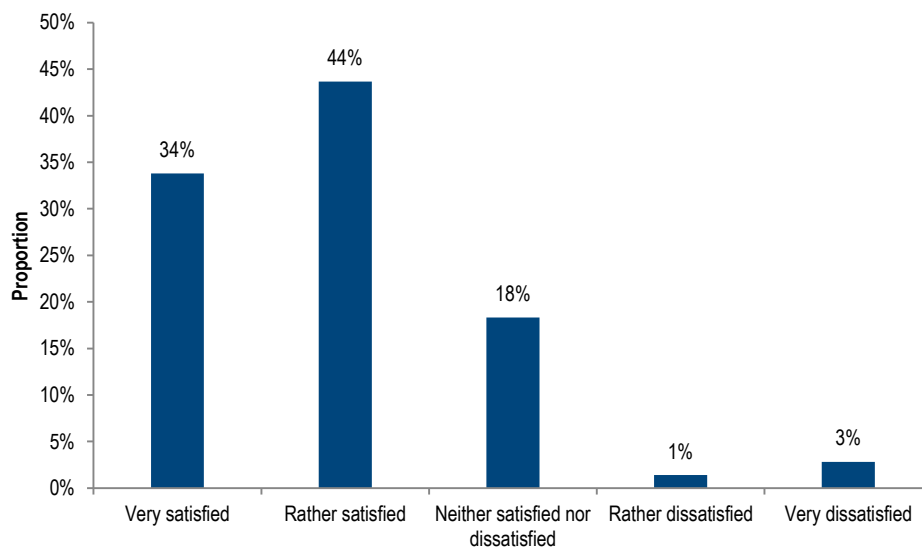
When it came to drafting reports and correspondence, there were occasions of disagreement on how or what to write, but interviewees indicated that people were generally satisfied with the results once they had had the opportunity to submit comments.

There were frequent heated debates and exchanges of views and many people disagreed. We would then often reach some sort of compromise on how to change the wording so that everybody would be satisfied [a member of the steering committee].

### ***Communications in the working groups***

The working groups were also composed of people with differing professional focuses. For instance, one interviewee from the steering committee indicated that their group contained representatives from the Homes Association of Iceland, who were very critical of government actions and of the Debtors' Ombudsman on the subject of household debt. Their views were so different from those of the other members of the working group that the 2011 interim report from the working group on household financial difficulties had to be accompanied by a Homes Association of Iceland protocol. The protocol stated that the Association's views had not been well received in the working group and that the report gave only limited information on their demands of the government (Welfare Watch, 2011b). Despite these differences, interviewees said that co-operation had been good and that people respected each other's views.














Results from the survey among members of the working groups reflect the views of the interviewees from the steering committee; just under 80% of respondents were satisfied with the co-operation with others in the group, 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 4% were dissatisfied (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** *On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with communications with others in the group? – Frequency*

Given the very low number of “dissatisfied” replies, these reply options were merged with those replying “neither satisfied not dissatisfied” for the purposes of the background analysis. Women were more satisfied with the collaboration than men, and those sitting on the steering committee were more satisfied with the collaboration than those not sitting on the steering committee. Those who were engaged in public services in ministries and those working for local authorities were usually more satisfied with the collaboration than those who worked elsewhere (see Table 26).

**Table 26. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with communications with others in the group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither/nor, very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	34%	44%	23%	71	 77%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	29%	43%	29%	35	 71%
Female	39%	44%	17%	36	 83%
<b>Age</b>					
24–49 years	29%	35%	35%	17	 65%
50–59 years	43%	38%	19%	37	 81%
60–68 years	18%	65%	18%	17	 82%
<b>Field of employment</b>					
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	25%	50%	25%	12	 75%
Education	29%	36%	36%	14	 64%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	27%	64%	9%	11	 91%
Other public services	47%	32%	21%	19	 79%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	33%	47%	20%	15	 80%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>					
Member of steering committee	50%	50%	0%	14	 100%
Not a member of steering committee	31%	40%	29%	55	 71%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

There was general satisfaction – around 60% – with information provision within the working groups. Roughly one out of ten were dissatisfied. Women were generally more satisfied than men. All members of the steering committee were satisfied with information provision within their working group, as opposed to three of every four who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 27).

**Table 27. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with information provision within the working group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	39%	38%	11%	11%	71	77%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	37%	31%	11%	20%	35	69%
Female	42%	44%	11%	3%	36	86%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	33%	44%	11%	11%	18	78%
50–59 years	43%	32%	11%	14%	37	76%
60–68 years	38%	44%	13%	6%	16	81%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	25%	58%	8%	8%	12	83%
Education	29%	50%	7%	14%	14	79%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	36%	18%	9%	11	73%
Other public services	63%	16%	16%	5%	19	79%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	33%	40%	7%	20%	15	73%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	57%	43%	0%	0%	14	100%
Not a member of steering committee	36%	36%	13%	15%	55	73%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### Working group and steering committee communications

Communications between the working groups and the Welfare Watch steering committee was channelled through the chairpersons of the working groups, who were also members of the steering committee. Discussions in the focus groups of members of the working groups suggested that people would have liked to have seen more co-operation between the steering committee and the working groups. One working group interviewee noted that their group had asked for a meeting with the steering committee to obtain information on what was expected of the group but that they had not been granted any such meeting. Other interviewees suggested that the working groups had had some difficulty working completely independently. For this reason, one interviewee suggested that it could have been possible to delimit the discussions taking place in working groups, and thereby improve their performance, by appointing one person whose job it would have been to channel information between the working groups and the steering committee.



It might have helped discussions and made them more organised if [...] The Welfare Watch had provided one person to meet with all the groups. Because then [...] that person would have known what each group was talking about and such, and could have kept the activities of the groups apart, if need be. Or they could have taken on the time-consuming task of taking minutes and drafting reports. I think that would have been very helpful [a member of a working group].

Just under 60% of working group respondents to the online survey said that they were satisfied with information provision between the steering committee and their working group. Just over one-fifth were dissatisfied. There was a difference in responses depending on whether or not respondents were also members of the steering committee, as just under half of those who were not members were satisfied with information provision between the steering committee and the working groups, as compared to almost all those who were members of the steering committee (see Table 28).

**Table 28. On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with information provision between the steering committee and the working group?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Very or rather dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	13%	44%	22%	21%	63	57%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	13%	50%	13%	25%	32	63%
Female	13%	39%	32%	16%	31	52%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	19%	25%	31%	25%	16	44%
50–59 years	6%	55%	21%	18%	33	61%
60–68 years	21%	43%	14%	21%	14	64%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	8%	58%	25%	8%	12	67%
Education	0%	50%	17%	33%	12	50%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	33%	33%	11%	22%	9	67%
Other public services	19%	25%	38%	19%	16	44%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	7%	57%	14%	21%	14	64%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	21%	64%	14%	0%	14	86%
Not a member of steering committee	9%	38%	26%	28%	47	47%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

One interviewee from the working group focus group said that the Welfare Watch steering committee had convened and met with all the working groups just once, to make preparations for writing a report. This meeting was considered to have been very important as regards strengthening relations with the steering committee members. It was considered important to enjoy good ties between the members of the working groups and the steering committee to ensure that the members of the working groups gained a better understanding of what was expected of them. Information was requested on the results of the work carried out in the working groups.

It was rather unclear what would happen to and what would be done with all of the sterling work that was done. And it might have been difficult to get answers on this. But the Minister received the report and it was up to him to take it to cabinet and have it discussed. And when that did happen, the process was not that clear either. This was a weakness [a member of a working group].

62% of working group respondents indicated that they had good knowledge of the work conducted by the steering committee, while one-fifth said they had little knowledge of the same. Half of those who were not members of the steering committee said they had good knowledge of the work conducted by the steering committee. There was also a difference according to field of work, with those engaged in public services in ministries and those working for local authorities or NGOs having better knowledge of the work conducted by the steering committee than those who worked elsewhere (see Table 29).

**Table 29. How familiar or unfamiliar were you with the work of the Welfare Watch steering committee?**

	Very well	Rather well	Neither well nor poorly	Rather poorly	Very poorly	Number	Very or rather well
<b>Total</b>	22%	41%	18%	15%	5%	79	62%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	19%	44%	19%	14%	3%	36	64%
Female	23%	37%	16%	16%	7%	43	60%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	10%	30%	15%	35%	10%	20	40%
50–59 years	28%	38%	21%	8%	5%	39	67%
60–68 years	20%	55%	15%	10%	0%	20	75%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	17%	42%	0%	25%	17%	12	58%
Education	6%	38%	31%	19%	6%	16	44%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	43%	7%	14%	0%	14	79%
Other public services	15%	40%	30%	10%	5%	20	55%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	35%	41%	12%	12%	0%	17	76%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	61%	39%	0%	0%	0%	18	100%
Not a member of steering committee	10%	40%	24%	19%	7%	58	50%

## Proposals from the Welfare Watch working groups

Each working group prepared interim reports containing proposals regarding that group's issues. The groups' proposals were discussed at steering committee meetings and then used as a basis for steering committee proposals put forward in reports to the government. In some cases, the working groups found it difficult to put forward clear proposals for improvement. One interviewee stated that their group had identified certain problems in society that needed to be addressed but that it had been difficult to come to a joint conclusion on how best to do so. This, in their view, was the reason for the proposals in the interim report not being particularly well expanded upon.

Tables 30–36 give an overview of the proposals contained in the working groups' interim reports. The various working groups set out their proposals in different ways. Some groups collected their proposals together in a list at the end of their reports, while others described the measures that needed to be taken in the main text of the report. In order to be able to set out all proposals in table form, the proposals of some groups had to be considerably shortened. This was particularly the case with proposals from groups who themselves had not presented them in lists. In the tables, those proposals which the steering committee used in their reports to the government are specifically marked. The wording and content of the proposals were, however, amended when they were included in the steering committee's reports, and in some cases, two or three working group proposals were merged into one.

As can be seen in Table 30, the working group on children and families with children put forward over 60 proposals in the three years that it operated. Some of these can be found in the steering committee reports, albeit in a slightly different form. For instance, the steering committee proposed in its March 2009 report that the conditions of young families with children should be specifically looked into. This proposal is obviously derived from a proposal from the relevant working group to the effect that changes in children's conditions – from pregnancy to 18 years – should be monitored. Another steering committee proposal in the same report recommended that children and families with children should be guaranteed access to professionals and that focus should be directed at family work in healthcare and social services. This proposal was developed out of two working group proposals: (a) to guarantee children and families with children immediate access to professionals, experts and consultants; and (b) to focus on family work in healthcare centres. The steering committee twice recommended that the government increase support and take specific action to improve the welfare and financial situation of low-income families with children, particularly single parents and their children. This proposal was contained in the steering committee reports from June 2011 and December 2013 and is probably based on three proposals from the April 2011 interim report of the working group on children and families with children. These three proposals were: (a) to support children of unemployed parents and parents in financial difficulties; (b) that Child Protection Services should consider support for children not growing up with both of their biological parents; and (c) to focus on the education of children in step-families and children of immigrants.

It can be seen that some of the group's proposals are similar to the proposed actions contained in the ICE-CCFR report on increasing numbers of notifications to Child Protection Services in the period 2005–2009 (Halldór S. Guðmundsson, 2009). It can therefore be concluded that this report was used as input for the group's work. In 2011, the working group on children and families with children put forward proposals to the effect that increased pressure on the child protection system should be dealt with and that stress levels among those working with children should be looked at. This is in accordance with the discussion of the subject in the ICE-CCFR report. It emerged that a constant rise in caseload would likely increase pressure in Child Protection Services and that the welfare and workload of staff should be looked at.

**Table 30. Proposals from the working group on children and families with children**

Year	Children and families with children	
2009	Monitor changes in the circumstance of children, from pregnancy to the age of 18.	√
	Monitor the position of children in fringe groups, such as the children of immigrants and children in step-families.	√
	Ensure immediate access for children and families with children to professionals, experts and advice.	√
	Focus on family based work in healthcare centres.	√
	Prevent waiting lists for consultation with experts and ensure a harmonised price list for their services.	
	Offer support for those who work with children.	
	Offer inter-personal relationship courses for children and families.	
	Avoid cutbacks in child protection services.	
	Employees are to receive professional guidance.	
	Strengthen Internet education, e.g. text message-advice for children.	
	Listen to and talk to children in homes, institutions and in the media.	
	The media and people working with children are to choose their words with care when speaking near children.	
	Do not increase levies on the parents of children in primary school.	
	Co-ordinate educational material to parents, such as on computers, drugs and communications.	√
	Monitor whether children cease participating in leisure activities due to poverty. Consider having them free of charge.	
	Ensure that children get necessary exercise and use nearby areas for this purpose.	
	Co-ordinate price lists for school meals, monitor participation and examine the possibility of having them free of charge.	√
Ensure that the affairs of children are given financial priority by the state and the local authorities.		
2011	Encourage primary school students to continue to study and assist them in finding appropriate schooling options.	
	Offer young unemployed people the option of shorter study programmes, even courses providing credits.	
	Promote the engagement of unemployed young people who are not entitled to benefits.	
	Work with support – youth programme workshop arrangements and folk high school at secondary school level.	
	Strengthen mitigating measures concurrently with cutbacks to ensure that the needs of groups receiving reduced services are met with special measures.	
	Decrease VAT on children's clothes and other goods needed by families with children.	
	Ensure that all children and youngsters have access to sports, leisure and youth activities irrespective of the financial standing of their parents.	
	Harmonise age criteria in institutions, companies and association as regards the pricing of services for children and youngsters.	√
	Monitor bullying issues in primary schools and examine the effect of cutbacks in supervision during breaks and the services of study and career counsellors.	
	Promote the preparation of bullying policies that covers the local community of each school.	
	Ensure that all students are granted a place in a secondary school once they have completed primary school.	
	Offer a greater number of study programmes and options for students once they complete primary school, e.g. folk high schools.	
	Specifically monitor that special education services are available in primary and secondary schools.	
	Place increased importance on the co-operation of all parties in each school community, especially increased involvement of parents.	
	Support children and parents of foreign origin whose mother tongue is other than Icelandic.	
	Ensure that children and youngsters have unrestricted access to educational material irrespective of financial standing, e.g. by using	
	Confront the increased pressure on the child protection system.	
Provide support to the children of unemployed parents and parents in financial difficulties.	√	
Child Protection Services should consider support for children who do not grow up with both parents.	√	
Focus on education to children in step-families and the children of immigrants.	√	
Establish a coordination centre for the affairs of children and youngsters.		

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

The table continues on the following page.

**Table 30, (cont'd). Proposals from the working group on children and families with children**

Year	Children and families with children
2011	<p>Child Protection Services should direct their attention to children who are the children of the second or third generation benefit recipients.</p> <p>Draw attention to the obligation to notify child protection authorities among those who work with children and youngsters.</p> <p>Attend to the affairs of foster children who are temporarily living away from their domicile, both professional and financial aspects.</p> <p>Ensure fluorine mouthwashes for all children.</p> <p>Increase subsidies for dentistry services for children and youngsters. Children aged from 4 to 18 are to have free dental examinations.</p> <p>Ensure psychiatric services for children with anxiety, behavioural or substance abuse problems. ✓</p> <p>Pay attention to youngsters of secondary school age due to the increased use of illegal narcotics.</p> <p>Strengthen parent co-operation in secondary schools and promote the co-operation of the community with secondary schools.</p> <p>Examine stress levels among employees in schools, social and healthcare services.</p> <p>Employee wellbeing must be improved with targeted actions, e.g. strengthen education and ensure job security.</p>
2013	<p>Evaluate child protection issues and strengthen the work of Child Protection Services in order to better follow up on cases.</p> <p>Ensure that the authorities are involved and employ special actions in the affairs of children living in very difficult circumstances.</p> <p>Strengthen pre-natal examinations and infant healthcare and pay particular attention to young mothers and mothers in poor social circumstances.</p> <p>Attend to children and youngsters who have been involved in serious crime, have been convicted and have had to be in prison with adults.</p> <p>Better support children who are living under difficult social circumstances due to the mental problems and/or drug abuse of their parents.</p> <p>Strengthen community services to children and their families and respond sooner to the problems of children.</p> <p>Increase co-operation between social services and healthcare services in order to e.g. reduce the load on BUGL (Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) and Child Protection Services.</p> <p>Attend to the dental health of children who are living under difficult social circumstances or who have low-income parents.</p> <p>Strengthen co-operation between the school and children and their parents to ensure support and study encouragement in their nearest surroundings.</p> <p>Increase support to children of foreign origin and their parents, such as in homework, access to leisure activities and education on their rights.</p> <p>Encourage fathers to use their right to paternity leave. ✓</p>

✓ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009b, 2011c; Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

Table 31 shows the proposals made by the working group on persons at risk both before and after the financial crisis. The group's first report from the spring of 2009 did not contain short, concise proposals. Instead, the main text of the report discussed what needed to be done for job-seekers, children and young adults in vulnerable families, pensioners, single parents and low-income individuals. The subsequent two reports contained shorter proposals or elements to be looked into. The steering committee included three of the group's proposals in their interim reports to the government, rewording the group's comments and specifically defining which groups in society the proposals were aimed at. In this connection, the June 2011 steering committee report proposes a study of conditions of those 16-year-olds opting not to continue in secondary education after completing primary education, the aim being to find ways for them to undertake suitable studies, whether academic study, vocational study or training. Similarly, the conditions of students dropping out of secondary education would also be looked at and efforts made to find them a way back into study. This proposal was very similar to the proposal put forward by the working group that same year to find ways of catering financially to young people dropping out of secondary education

because of the economic situation. The steering committee expanded the proposal to include both those finishing primary education and those dropping out of secondary education.

**Table 31. Proposals from the working group on persons at risk both before and after the financial crisis**

Year	Persons at risk both before and after the crash.	
2009	Attend to those who are leaving the labour market, aged 60 and older.	
	Attend to those who are completing their education and are unemployed.	
	Establish a "activities centre" to reach those who receive financial assistance from municipalities.	
	Increase the collaboration of public bodies and offer diverse options for employment seekers.	√
	Utilise the "third sector" (NGOs) and sports associations better; recruit job seekers to carry out fixed tasks each day and condition benefits to tasks.	√
	Offer children living in poor financial circumstances subsidised meals in schools and during summer courses.	
	Offer children courses that are cheap – free of charge for certain groups.	
	Strengthen measures already in place and make them free for children, e.g. public bus services, swimming pools.	
	Spread the cost of items that primary school children need to buy/pay over the entire school year.	
	Strengthen study and social counselling in primary and secondary schools.	
	Pay particular attention to children of foreign origin within schools and leisure activity options for them.	
	Improve information provision to immigrants, attend better to the rules of the social services.	
	Attend to the children of immigrants who are applying for assistance and who seek the help of aid organisations.	
	Establish an information bank with educational material that makes it easier for professionals to inform the public.	
	Prevent the unemployed being unable to return to the labour market.	
	Gather information on the composition and circumstances of people without employment.	
	Those who are seeking employment and are not entitled to benefits should be registered with a labour exchange service and have the option of education, courses and retraining. The financial assistance would remain with the municipality while the activities would be the responsibility of the labour exchange.	
	Educational offers need to be increased, people with short employment records (e.g. due to illness, recent completion of studies) and who are not entitled to other than social services, need to be activated on a person to person level and encouraged to participate (e.g. in rehabilitation and voluntary work).	
	2010	Ensure that everyone who is unemployed receives comparable counselling and treatment on employment offers. Might be a good idea to divide the operations of the Directorate of Labour into two parts – a) Registration and monitoring and b) Counselling, courses and labour exchange.
		Attend to the position of those in the rent market.
Particular attention must be paid to how to approach unemployed men and possibly have them themselves organise measures appropriate to men in their position.		
Focus on guidance, education and information dissemination to counsellors as regards measures due to the increasing load on welfare services.		
Prepare a database containing information on the available remedies for professionals so that they can educate others.		
Immigrants need to be urged to register their domicile in Iceland due to the rights linked to the registration of domicile.		
Pay better attention to individuals who accept financial assistance from the municipalities to try to prevent social isolation.		
The long-term view must be taken with the interests of coming generations in mind; with short-term and long-term projects and solutions in mind. A plan for 2010 needs to be prepared in the affairs of those at the greatest disadvantage, as for others, and in the debate on economic growth and job creation, welfare and social justice may not be ignored.		
Housing benefits should not be reduced when children who live with their parents become 18 years. The reference age should be raised to 20 years.		
The parents of children aged 16 to 18 should be allowed to use the tax allowance of their children. This applies especially to single parents.		
Strengthen family ties and the skill and the strength of parents with courses, education and open discourse about the challenges families face today.		
Find ways to financially address the problems of young people who drop out of secondary schools due to the economic conditions.		√
Ensure acceptable healthcare services for individuals and families in financial difficulties.		
Ensure acceptable dentistry services for individuals and families in financial difficulties.		
Ensure speech therapy services for individuals and families in financial difficulties.		
Keep the cost of medicinal products at a minimum for those who are most disadvantaged – finish work already started on the ceiling for medications and medical care.		
Review minimum living expenses criteria and children's insurance.		
Review interactions between benefits so that the increase in one type of benefits does not automatically lead to decreases in other types.		
Ensure social housing where the rent is lower than in the open market.		
Attend to other options to enable people to acquire cheap, safe housing (e.g. "manual workers' system").		
Strengthen individually-tailored counselling to persons who have been on long-term unemployment benefits or who have received municipal financial assistance.		

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009c, 2009d, 2011d).

The working group on the recession and health was disbanded in 2010, and a new working group on public health was set up (Hilma Hólmfríður Sigurðardóttir, in press). Table 32 shows that two of the proposals put forward by the group in March 2009 were published in a report from the steering committee to the government that same year. These were: (a) a proposal to ensure that deteriorating finances did not impede access to health services; and (b) a proposal to ensure that healthcare service levels would not be cut back. The steering committee merged these two proposals into one, thus: “Measures must be taken to ensure that a deterioration in financial standing does not prevent people from using healthcare services, to ensure that the healthcare system will take the initiative in contacting those recipients of its services who are in particular risk groups, to ensure that its level of services is not reduced and that all changes in the level of demand on the health services are closely monitored.”

**Table 32. Proposals from the working group on the recession and health / on public health**

Year	The recession and state of health
2009	Employees of healthcare centres must be systematically educated about the long-term effects of stress on health and behaviour.
	Key groups must be systematically educated about the effects of long-term stress on health and wellbeing (school employees, priests, social services and the public).
	Risk groups (such as the unemployed, chronically ill, young families with children) must be specifically defined and educational material especially tailored for such groups.
	Ensure that worsening finances do not hinder access to healthcare services. ✓
	Ensure that the service level of healthcare services is not reduced. ✓
	That employees of healthcare centres and elsewhere in the frontline receive increased professional and personal support due to the stress resulting from the economic circumstances.
	That savings in one area do not lead to increased costs elsewhere.
	Focus on free school meals, subsidised fitness programmes, use of unemployment benefits for new jobs, etc. or such preventative measures where social and health-related aspects overlap.
	Carry out a survey of health and wellbeing prior to 2009 to compare with the same survey carried out by the Public Health Institute of Iceland in 2007.
	It is important to closely monitor the feelings of healthcare workers as regards increasing distress within companies and the school system.
<b>Public health group</b>	
2011	Seek specialised solutions for the group of pregnant women (20% ) who are believed to live under conditions for which specialised remedies are considered necessary (young women, women with learning disabilities, disabled women and women of foreign origin).
	Revise the payment participation of pregnant women for pre-natal care services.
	Reorganise services to pregnant women whose body mass index (BMI) is over 30.
	Seek ways to improve the mental health of mothers during pregnancy and assist with emotional attachment to the newborn baby .
	Strengthen education and training in interest stimulating conversation techniques for midwives and others providing pregnant women with services, e.g. as regards smoking and the use of alcohol as well as nutrition and mental health.
	Increase the sensitivity of those providing services to pick up on signs of violence during pregnancy.
	Prepare a new electronic pre-natal care registry.
	Increase co-operation with spontaneous groups for the support of pregnant women within the healthcare system.

✓ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009e; Ministry of Welfare, 2013a)



Table 33 shows proposals from *the working group on youth and young people*. In the spring of 2009, the group put forward many proposals on the subject of opportunities for young people to undertake study. The main issues were identified as the supply, diversity and quality of study programmes and opportunities for young people to earn income. The second interim report from the working group in June 2009 focused on the same issues as the previous report, but with six extra proposals. These dealt with: the role of municipalities in shaping action on young people's issues; the supply of electronic study material; payment grace periods or payment plans for secondary-school fees; the opportunities for young people to receive unemployment benefit in order to study; and the amount of rural support grants. Three of the proposals put forward in the group's first report were expanded upon and published in the steering committee's first report to the government. The working group's proposal to increase employment opportunities by means of state and municipal initiatives was clarified in the steering committee report with a description of how this might be done. State and local authorities were urged to recruit young people from the unemployment register for temping and summer work.

**Table 33. Proposals from the working group on youth and young people**

Year	Youngsters and young adults	
2009	Accept all students who apply for a place in school.	√
	Do not reduce funds to educational institutions.	
	Offer summer courses in secondary schools and universities.	
	Support social activities in schools.	
	Increase mental and medical assistance.	
	Increase student counselling services in schools.	
	Increase preventative work in schools.	
	Increase co-operation with public bodies and associations (outside schools) and support the activities of young people involved therein.	
	Increase teaching of the management of students' own finances and education on the economy.	
	Set up study rooms in schools to assist students in their studies.	
	Provide extra support to immigrants.	
	Increase the availability of leisure activities.	
	Ensure that all students have access to laptops and the Internet in school-work.	
	Increase job opportunities through state and municipal initiative projects.	√
	Offer unemployment benefits or student loans during studies.	
	Organise schooling in the basic tenets of ethics together with links into all school stages.	
	Ensure that the equalisation grant remains in place. It may, however, be a good idea to make the grant performance-linked.	
	Reduce student costs for school attendance, such as due to study materials, transport, boarding and catering.	
	Review municipal rules on maintenance so that they require a certain level of engagement from those who receive maintenance assistance.	
	Create projects that relate to engagement	
	It is important that the increase in the number of students is not detrimental to the quality of the education.	
	Rising rents (due to price indexations) in student apartments need to be addressed.	
	Establish summer semesters in the universities that do not have them, e.g. August examinations in the University of Iceland.	
	Raise student loans and pay them out on a monthly basis.	
	Raise housing benefits.	
	Unions, lifelong learning centres and secondary schools should work together on the affairs of unemployed young people and provide shorter study courses, leisure activity options and recognition of courses from lifelong learning centres.	√
	Offer a greater diversity of education for young people than is currently available; folk high schools, employment-related courses, etc.	
	Provide all youngsters with the opportunity to practice sports irrespective of financial position.	
	A better linkage between groups is needed, such as between the state and municipalities and different public bodies and associations.	
	Decision-making powers need to be clear in the affairs of the group, and issues need to be prioritised according to circumstances.	
	Lessons need to be learned and the measures taken during the last downturn in 1991–1993 need to be utilised.	
	Take advantage of the local authorities' social services. Local authorities need to immediately formulate measures to react to and change their rules.	
	Make use of the system already in place. Municipalities that have rules on special support/remedies must activate such systems.	
	Book purchase grants must be available and book costs must be reduced, e.g. by providing more educational material in electronic format.	
	Secondary schools should offer deferred payments or distribute school fees over a longer period. Under special circumstances, such fees may have to be cancelled.	
	Allow young people on unemployment benefits to undertake credit-providing courses during normal day-time working hours instead of in evening courses.	
	Attention must be paid to the amount of rural support grants to young people domiciled in areas where there are no secondary schools.	

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009f, 2009h)

The first progress report from the working group on unemployed people from the spring of 2009 contains various suggestions on how to improve things for people neither working nor studying. The group did not put forward any proposals in its second progress report of 2009 but carried over the proposals from the first report, which they considered to be still fully valid and in need of implementation. Neither did the group's third progress report, from 2011, contain a specific section on proposals for improvement. That said, the group's discussion of the position of unemployed people and the measures available did mention various things that should be looked into. Table 34 gives an overview of the group's main focuses. It also shows that the steering committee used several of the proposals put forward by the group in 2009.

**Table 34. Proposals from the working group on unemployed people**

Year	The unemployed	
2009	Offer a broad range of options (e.g. educational options), assistance and provision of information.	
	Increase job-related measures for groups and adults who are not engaged.	√
	Ensure that the employed can gain an overview of all available measures from a single source of information.	
	Prepare a document with all the necessary information for the unemployed (e.g. links to websites) and distribute it to them.	
	Organise financial support for individuals and their families so that they do not become "stuck" in the system and find it hard to accept paid work when such work is offered, e.g. by binding financial support to low disposable income and not benefits.	√
	Care must be taken to ensure that all children enjoy services such as meals at school, placement in nursery schools, recreational activities etc. independent of their parents financial circumstances.	√
	Collect together quality information on the needs and circumstances of the unemployed.	
	Strengthen measures that have been particularly successful at the Directorate of Labour (such as confidence building courses and work-related courses).	
	Promote new ideas and innovation with support systems for the unemployed.	
	Revise the arrangements of disability pensions and rehabilitation pensions, e.g. by extending the period during which rehabilitation pensions can be paid.	√
	Establish a work ability assessment to replace the disability assessment and ensure people's activeness through rehabilitation.	
	Speed up the revision of the social security system to allow the adoption of a new rights system as soon as possible.	√
	Strengthen the collaboration between the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund, the Directorate of Labour and the Social Security Institute and promote their consultancy services.	√
Attend to those wanting to return to the job market after a break and who have little or no entitlement to benefits (e.g. students).	√	
2011	Those who have completely exercised their entitlement to unemployment benefits are not to lose their benefit entitlement if their spouse is engaged in paid work with income exceeding minimum limits.	
	Revise the regulation that prevented the possibility of local authorities being able to use the same measures for their clients as the Directorate of Labour offers to those receiving unemployment benefits.	
	Increase funding to secondary schools for measures for those aged 18 and older.	
	The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science must find a solution for students from UFTA (ungt fólk til athafna; "spurring the young to action") who are unable to find a workplace willing to hire those who have completed occupational training within the school.	
	It is important that the municipalities focus on ensuring summer jobs for young people.	
	Approach foreign citizens, map the situation and offer more long-term measures, such as Icelandic language education lasting for up to a year.	
	Attend to gender ratios: The number of women searching for work will probably not decrease as it is likely that the jobs created through the actions of the authorities will be "male" jobs.	

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009g, 2009i, 2011e)

The first progress report from the steering committee from March 2009 used proposals from the working groups on unemployed people on social security and on collaboration between the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund, the Directorate of Labour and the Social Security Institute. The steering committee's 2011 report contained proposals for occupational measures and measures for people not entitled to benefits. These proposals were, however, amended considerably by the steering committee. For instance, the steering committee put forward a proposal to speed up plans to revise the social security system, with a particular examination of the disability-assessment system and the structure of disability-benefit payments. It was also proposed that work on the revision of the rules regarding maximum payments in the healthcare system be brought to completion as soon as possible. The first part of this proposal originated with the working group on unemployed people, which had made special reference to the importance of speeding up the review of the social security system and the need to examine the disability-assessment system and the structure of disability-benefit payments. The second part of the steering committee proposal, however, dealt with healthcare system costs, an issue not discussed in the first progress report from the working group on unemployed people.

The progress reports from the working group on household financial difficulties points to various ways of supporting households but did not contain a specific list of the group's proposals. Table 35 brings together the various proposals put forward by the group. It also shows that the group's work was used as a basis for proposals in the steering committee's progress reports. For instance, the steering committee's reports from March and August 2009 contain five proposals on the subject of household financial difficulties which are related to the issues dealt with in the reports drafted by the working group on household financial difficulties that same year. Since the working group couched their priorities in the main text of their reports, they were obviously reworded before being included as proposals in the steering committee's progress report.

**Table 35. Proposals from the working group on household financial difficulties**

Year	Financial difficulties of households	
2009	Partial cancellation of debts.	
	Abolishment or reduction of price indexation.	
	Possibility that the debt cancellations of claim holders do not lead to the taxation of the debtor.	
	Enact legislation on debt mitigation.	
	Enact legislation on the netting of foreign currency loans or make it possible to renegotiate foreign currency loans.	
	The interest benefits system should be revised taking income criteria into account.	
	The refunding of interest and price adjustment should be revised.	
	The tax system should be used to encourage individuals to invest in commercial concerns.	
	Comprehensively review remedies intended to: a) help those in the greatest difficulties, b) assist those who are at risk and are likely to experience difficulties, c) support those who are still able to cope and who, through the simple actions of the authorities and creditors can lower their payment burdens and thereby survive the difficulties that are likely to emerge in the next 1–2 years.	√
	Focus on ensuring that those who are able to pay, pay their loans in order to make it possible to support those in the greatest difficulties.	
	The authorities should review the housing system as a whole to ensure that people do not remain debt-ridden into old age.	√
	The authorities should avoid actions that lead to too much reduction in private consumption.	
	Companies should be assisted to maintain employment levels.	
	Ensure that the Central Bank of Iceland is able to process data on household finances and regularly publish conclusions on the situation as current.	
	Tailor information on the measures available to needs so that people can make informed decisions.	
	The media should present such measures in a positive manner and provide guidance.	
	The Family Finances Advisory Office should continue to be operated.	
	The authorities should clearly state whether further mitigating measures are to be taken with respect to debtors.	√
	Further mitigating measures must be found for people who took exchange rate indexed loans to purchase housing.	√
	Correct the misunderstanding that people who have defaulted on the loans cannot take advantage of payment difficulty measures.	
Set forth measures for people who had car loans in foreign currencies.	√	
It is necessary to create a consensus in the community through extensive collaboration with as many stakeholders as possible.		
Make the refinancing of indexed loans possibly more economical.		
Assess the usefulness of the available mitigating measures and revise such measures if necessary.	√	
Prevent further increases in the number of people in payment difficulties.	√	
2011	Adopt a centralised database on the financial standing of households.	√
	Examine whether it is possible to extend the application deadline for the 110% method.	
	It should be noted that fewer households have taken advantage of the mitigating measures than was anticipated.	√

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Sources: The Welfare Watch, 2009b, 2009j, 2011f)

The working group on youth and young people and the working group on unemployed people were subsequently merged, and in their last Welfare Watch progress report, the new group went under the name of “Working group on young people (15–25)”. This report carried over to a considerable extent the proposals from the progress reports of the two original groups, as they were considered to be still fully valid.

**Table 36. Proposals from the merged group on unemployed people and young people**

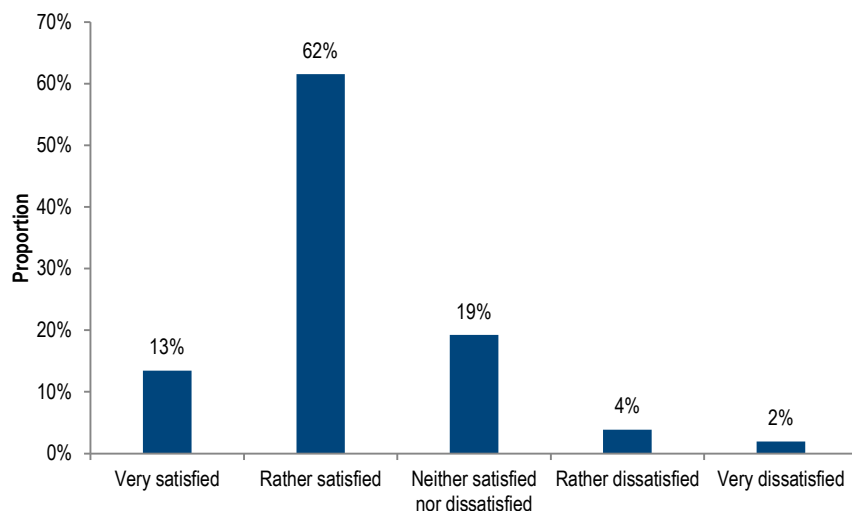
Year	Merged group: The unemployed and young people
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilise the educational options already available, particularly short and practical vocational training courses.</li> <li>Ensure that workplaces can accept people for on-the-job training.</li> <li>Encourage municipalities to ensure summer jobs for young people.</li> <li>Accept applications for placement in secondary schools and universities, from both new students and those planning to begin studying after a break.</li> <li>Increase mental and medical assistance together with student counselling and preventative work in schools.</li> <li>Set up study rooms in schools to assist students.</li> <li>Increase collaboration with public bodies and associations (outside schools). Opportunities for collaboration with the "third sector" (NGOs).</li> <li>Provide all youngsters with the opportunity to practice sports irrespective of financial position.</li> <li>Increase teaching of the management of students' own finances and education on the economy.</li> <li>Provide special support for immigrants and their children.</li> <li>Ensure that all students have access to a laptop and the Internet for schoolwork.</li> <li>Increase job opportunities through state and municipal initiative projects.</li> <li>Focus on ensuring the social engagement of the unemployed. Guide this group in a positive direction, e.g. work with NGOs.</li> <li>Ensure sufficient availability of projects involving engagement and offer "real" projects that young people can undertake and see the results of their work.</li> <li>Address rising rents (due to price indexations) in student apartments. Raise rent benefits and student loans.</li> <li>Decision-making powers need to be clear in the affairs of the group and prioritise issues according to circumstances.</li> </ul>

√ The proposal of the working group was set forth as a proposal from the steering committee in the steering committee's progress report.

(Source: Ministry of Welfare, 2013a)

The tables above all show that the vast majority of working group proposals emerged in the early years of Welfare Watch. Furthermore, the steering committee included more working group proposals from 2009 in its progress reports than those put forward by the working groups later.

Participants in the working group online survey were asked whether or not they were satisfied with the proposals that the steering committee opted to take forward. Three-quarters of respondents said that they were satisfied with the proposals that the steering committee opted to take forward, while around one-fifth had no opinion on the subject (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the proposals that the steering committee opted to take forward? – Frequency**

Given the very low number of “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” replies, these reply options were merged with those replying “neither satisfied not dissatisfied” for the purposes of the background analysis.

This background analysis revealed that women were more satisfied with the steering committee’s decisions on selecting proposals than men. People working in public services in ministries or local authorities were more dissatisfied than others. Unsurprisingly, the steering committee respondents were more satisfied with the steering committee’s decisions on selecting proposals than those who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 37).

**Table 37. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the proposals that the steering committee opted to take forward?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Neither/nor, rather or very dissatisfied	Number	Very or rather satisfied
<b>Total</b>	13%	62%	25%	52	75%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	7%	56%	37%	27	63%
Female	20%	68%	12%	25	88%
<b>Age</b>					
24–49 years	30%	40%	30%	10	70%
50–59 years	7%	68%	25%	28	75%
60–68 years	14%	64%	21%	14	79%
<b>Field of employment</b>					
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	0%	86%	14%	7	86%
Education	10%	60%	30%	10	70%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	10%	50%	40%	10	60%
Other public services	27%	53%	20%	15	80%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	10%	70%	20%	10	80%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>					
Member of steering committee	13%	80%	7%	15	93%
Not a member of steering committee	14%	56%	31%	36	69%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

## Proposals from the steering committee to the government and what became of them

The main role of the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security (later the Minister of Welfare) is to take on board the Welfare Watch's proposals and try to bring them to fruition. According to former Minister of Welfare Guðbjartur Hannesson, "this was done with various degrees of success". He specifically identifies a lack of funds as the reason for some Welfare Watch proposals not being implemented.

This was a time of severe cutbacks, and unfortunately, we had to choose where these cutbacks would fall. Development was not a priority [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].

Árni Páll Árnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security, was of the same mind when asked about what had happened to the Welfare Watch's proposals. He also indicated that some issues would have been difficult to pass due to a lack of political agreement or differences of opinion on how they should be implemented.

Some challenges, such as the debt issue, were unpopular. I felt great reluctance on the part of the government to deal with them. Nobody wanted to touch them unless they had to [Árni Páll Árnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

Although these comments from the two ministers suggest that the government only partially succeeded in utilising the proposals from the Welfare Watch steering committee, a content analysis of material issued by the government and Alþingi in the period 2009–2013 revealed that various plans and pieces of legislation entering into force during that time were very similar to the Welfare Watch's proposals. For instance, many of the proposals put forward in the Welfare Watch's first interim report were taken up in the government's welfare action plan (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a). The Welfare Watch was given the task of monitoring various actions set out in the action plan, and according to a report from the steering committee later that year, the government had begun work on various actions, as detailed below (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009b).

### ***Steering committee proposals based on the work of the working groups***

As indicated above, a content analysis was conducted of material published by the Welfare Watch, including reports related to the Watch and proposals from working groups and the steering committee. One of the purposes of this analysis was to monitor the steering committee's proposals and to ascertain the impact they had had on government action. Government and Alþingi actions and activities in welfare matters in the period 2009–2013 were scrutinised and their relation to the steering committee's proposals analysed. The work of public agencies and the Welfare Watch affiliates during this time was also looked at, with a view to establishing links to the Welfare Watch's proposals. As indicated above, the Welfare Watch's proposals were based on working group reports, although they were often elaborated on in steering committee reports. Some steering



committee's proposals were clearly worded and their potential success if implemented was clear. One example of this was the proposal to ensure all children would receive lunch in Icelandic schools as of 2009. Other proposals were less clear, and it is therefore difficult to trace what happened to them after referral to the minister. An example of this from the same year was the proposal to launch measures to assist persons who were basically still able to cope but were potentially at risk of becoming ensnared in financial difficulties, in order to prevent an expansion of the group of persons in financial difficulty.

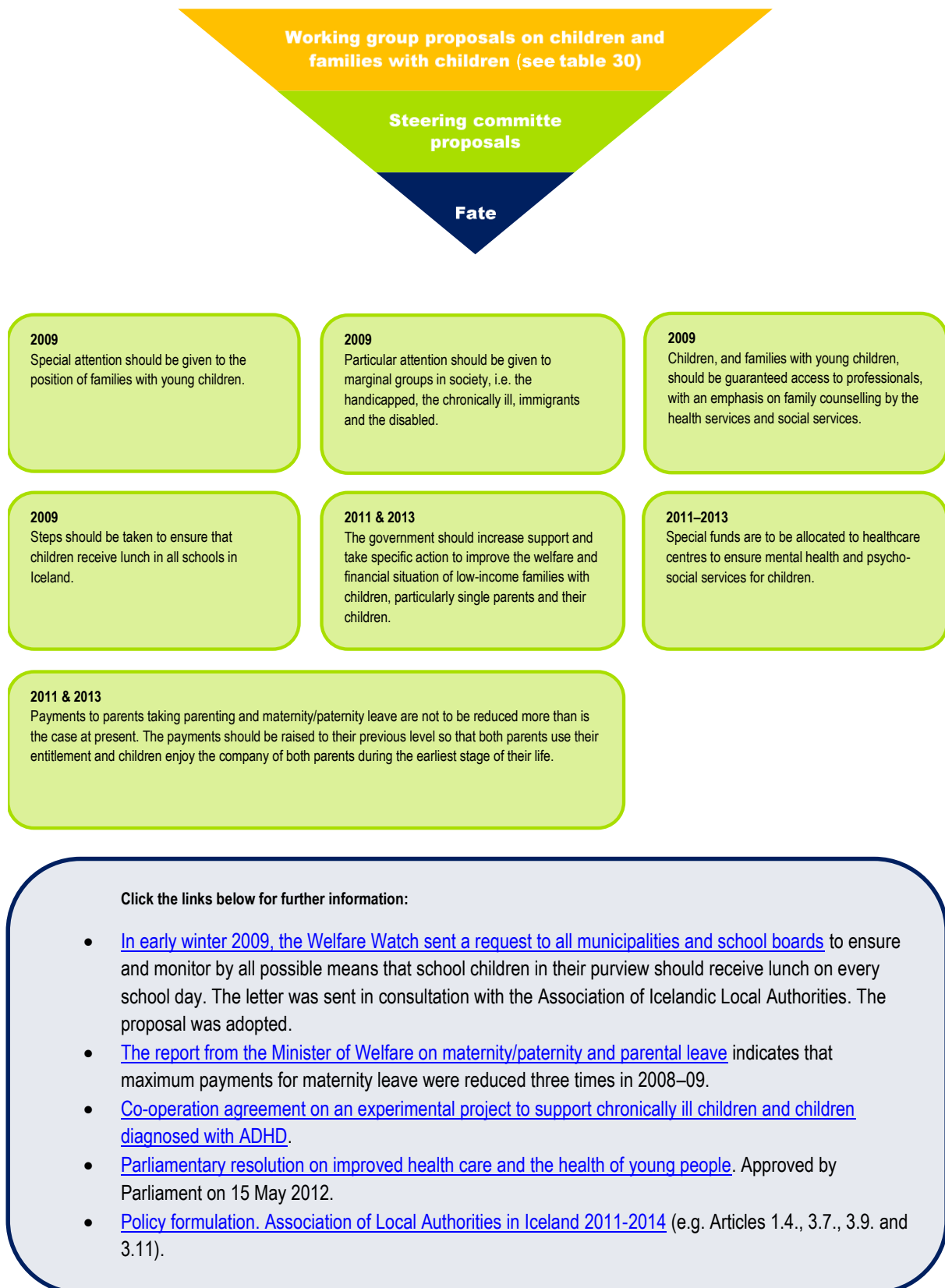
Figures 8–15 below give an overview of all the proposals put forward by the steering committee in the period 2009–2013, grouped according to the same themes as the working groups were allocated. The last figure, Figure 15, is an overview of proposals emerging from steering committee meetings but which do not seem to be related to the work of the working groups. The fate of these proposals with the authorities (government and Alþingi) appears at the bottom of the figures, together with examples in the text of further success with public agencies and the Welfare Watch affiliates. It should be borne in mind when tracing what happened to these proposals, that it is almost impossible to conclude whether the authorities' response was a result of recommendations from the Welfare Watch or whether these actions would have been implemented in any case. It should also be noted that what follows is not an exhaustive list of the success achieved thanks to the Welfare Watch activities. There are certainly many other examples other than those listed here of success stories in Icelandic society which came about thanks to the Welfare Watch.

Figure 8 shows the steering committee's proposals related to the work of the working group on children and families with children, together with what happened to such proposals. The Welfare Watch proposal to ensure that all children receive lunch in Icelandic schools was taken up in the government's action plan of 2009. The Welfare Watch, in consultation with the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities, issued a request to this effect to all municipalities and school boards on 16 September 2009 (Parliamentary Document 714, 2009–10). The request was reiterated to municipalities every autumn. This work seems to have been successful, as two years after municipalities and school boards received the first request, the steering committee was informed that school lunches for all children had become a reality and that in many places they would also be offered porridge for breakfast (The Welfare Watch, 2011).

Not all of the steering group's proposals, however, received the hoped for response. The Welfare Watch issued a warning regarding the government's plan in late 2009 to partially postpone parental and maternity leave payments. Following the economic collapse, maximum payments for maternity leave were reduced three times by means of amendments to Act No. 95/2000 on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave. Payments were reduced from ISK 480,000 to ISK 400,000 (cf. Act No. 173/2008 on State Finance Measures), then from ISK 400,000 to ISK 350,000 (cf. Act No. 70/2009 on State Finance Measures) and finally, from ISK 350,000 to ISK 300,000 (cf. Act No. 120/2009) (Parliamentary Document 912, 2010–11). In 2011, the steering committee recommended that payments to parents on maternity/paternity leave should not be reduced further, but rather increased towards previous levels to enable both parents to make use of their



entitlement to such leave (The Welfare Watch, 2011). In late 2012, maximum payments were increased to ISK 350,000 by means of Act No. 143/2012 amending Act No. 95/2000 on Maternity/Paternity and Parental leave, as amended. The Welfare Watch's proposal from 2011 was reiterated in 2013 (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

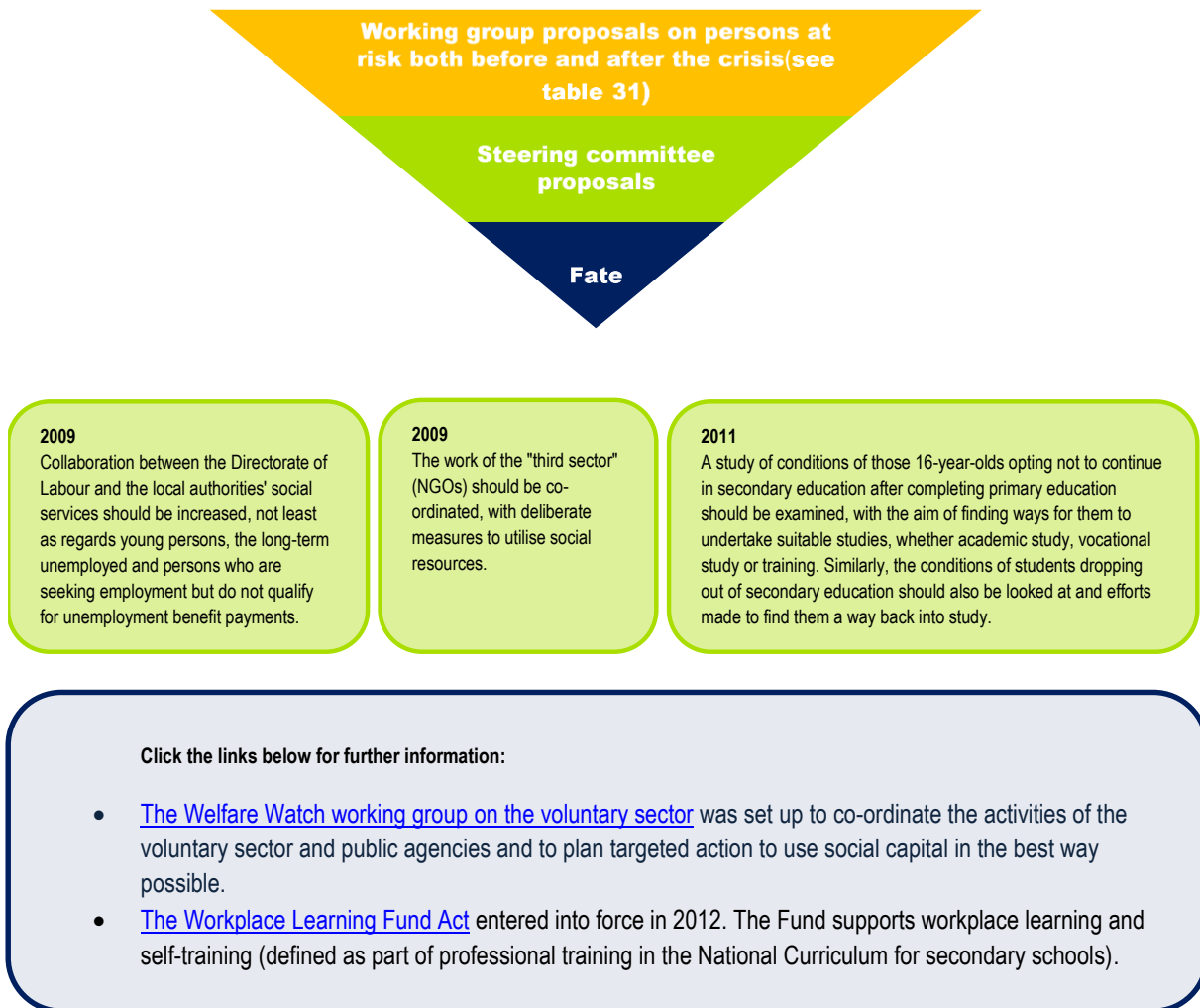


(Sources: Icelandic Parliament, 2012; Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a, 2009b; Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Health and the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities, 2009, 2011; Ministry of Welfare, 2011a, 2013a; Parliamentary Document 714, 2009–10; Parliamentary Document 912, 2010–11)

**Figure 8. Steering committee's proposals for the period 2009–2013 related to the issues dealt with by the working group on children and families with children, together with what became of them**

Figure 9 shows the steering committee's proposals based on the work of the working group on persons at risk both before and after the financial crisis. One of the proposals of the government's action plan was for NGOs, in co-operation with the government and municipalities, to help with ensuring that the work of public bodies and the third sector is co-ordinated and that targeted actions would be undertaken to enable social capital to be used in the best possible way (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009c; Ministry of Welfare, 2010a). A Welfare Watch working group on the third sector was set up in 2010 to respond to what had been proposed. The group put forward the idea of setting up a centre which would gather together and provide information on voluntary work. As regards the co-ordination of projects within the third sector, one of the group's proposals was for the Welfare Watch steering committee, in co-operation with the municipalities, to hold a meeting with representatives of the third sector at which knowledge could be exchanged (Ministry of Welfare, 2010a).

*The Workplace Learning Fund Act* entered into force in 2012. The fund was created to support public bodies and companies with their self-training and workplace-learning needs. The Directorate of Labour's *Pathway* initiative of 2013 was a response to the Welfare Watch's proposal to step up co-operation between the Directorate of Labour and local authority social services. The project related to services for unemployed people not entitled to unemployment benefits but who were receiving financial support from local authority social services. The objective was to support those in search of work and reduce the number of those needing financial support from local authorities (Directorate of Labour, 2013).



(Sources: Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a, 2009b; Workplace Learning Fund Act (No. 71/2012); Ministry of Welfare, 2010a, 2011a)

**Figure 9. Steering committee's proposals in the period 2009–2013 regarding the issues dealt with by the working group on persons at risk both before and after the financial crisis**

The Icelandic Director of Health had a seat on the Welfare Watch steering committee and informed the other members of the health impact of the financial crisis. The Directorate of Health changed focus after the financial crisis and took specific action to step up monitoring. It also began regularly monitoring the changes occurring in healthcare service usage (Directorate of Health, 2009), a decision which tallied with part of the Welfare Watch steering committee proposal from 2009 to properly monitor changes in healthcare service usage (see Figure 10).



**2009**

Steps must be taken to ensure that a deterioration in people's financial position should not prevent them from having access to health services, that the healthcare services take the initiative on contacting care recipients who are in risk groups, that the level of the healthcare services should not be lowered and that changes in demand for health care be monitored closely.

Click the links below for further information:

- [The Directorate of Health monitors key figures on health-service usage in Iceland.](#) The Welfare Watch regularly keeps up with any changes in health-service usage through the Director of Health, who is a member of the steering committee. These figures include mortality figures, particularly data on medication use and suicide.

(Sources: Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a; Directorate of Health, 2009; Parliamentary Document 714, 2010–11)

**Figure 10. Steering committee's proposals for the period 2009–2013 related to the issues dealt with by the working group on the recession and health**

Figure 11 gives examples of government action related to steering committee's proposals on youth and young people. A parliamentary resolution on education and job creation brings together the main strands of government policy on education and employment, with the focus on defining education needs in employment, developing diverse learning programmes and increasing the value of vocational training (Parliamentary Document 736, 2010–11). Secondary schools were opened up in the autumn of 2011 to enable all applicants for secondary education up to 25 years of age to be admitted. At the same time, efforts were made to increase the availability of learning opportunities for the unemployed. Up to 1,000 such opportunities were offered in secondary schools, universities and elsewhere, funded from the Unemployment Benefit Fund.

In June 2011, the government approved ISK 100 million for labour market measures for young unemployed people not covered within the unemployment insurance system. Subsequently, a

project known as *Employment Centre* (jointly run by the Ministry of Welfare, the Directorate of Labour, Reykjavik City Council and the town councils of Reykjanes, Hafnarfjörður and Kópavogur) was launched in 2012. The aim of the project was to mobilise young job seekers and provide young people neither in work nor in study with support and advice to find suitable solutions for themselves (Ministry of Welfare, 2012a). Employment Centre catered specifically to those not entitled to benefits, but also those who had just lost their entitlement at the Directorate of Labour or needed further assistance to get onto the job market (Reykjavik City, no date).



(Sources: Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a; Business Education Centre, no date; Parliamentary Document 714, 2009–10); Ministry of Welfare, 2011c, 2012a; Continuing Education Act No. 27/2010; Parliamentary Document 736, 2010–11)

**Figure 11. Steering committee’s proposals for the period 2009–2013 related to the issues dealt with by the working group on youth and young people**

Much of what was proposed in relation to employment issues concerned the operations of the Directorate of Labour (see Figure 12). The Welfare Watch sent a letter to all government agencies and municipalities encouraging them to take advantage of the job market measures offered by the Directorate of Labour (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009b). One of the Directorate of Labour measures identified by the Welfare Watch was the *Youth Action* initiative, the aim of which was to ensure that no more than three months should elapse between young people (18–24) losing their job and being offered a new job, a learning opportunity, vocational training or other opportunity (Ministry of Welfare, 2010). *Knowledge and Experience* was a personalised solution offered by the Directorate of Labour for the long-term unemployed. The Welfare Watch formed the view that such initiatives particularly catering to older unemployed people should be supported (Ministry of Welfare, 2011). The 2012 experimental project *WORK* (run jointly by the Ministry of Welfare, the Directorate of Labour, the Icelandic Confederation of Labour and SA – Business Iceland) was set up to promote more active job market measures to improve unemployed people's chances of getting back on the job market. Another Directorate of Labour job market measure worthy of mention is *Pathway* (2013), which caters to jobseekers not entitled to benefits.

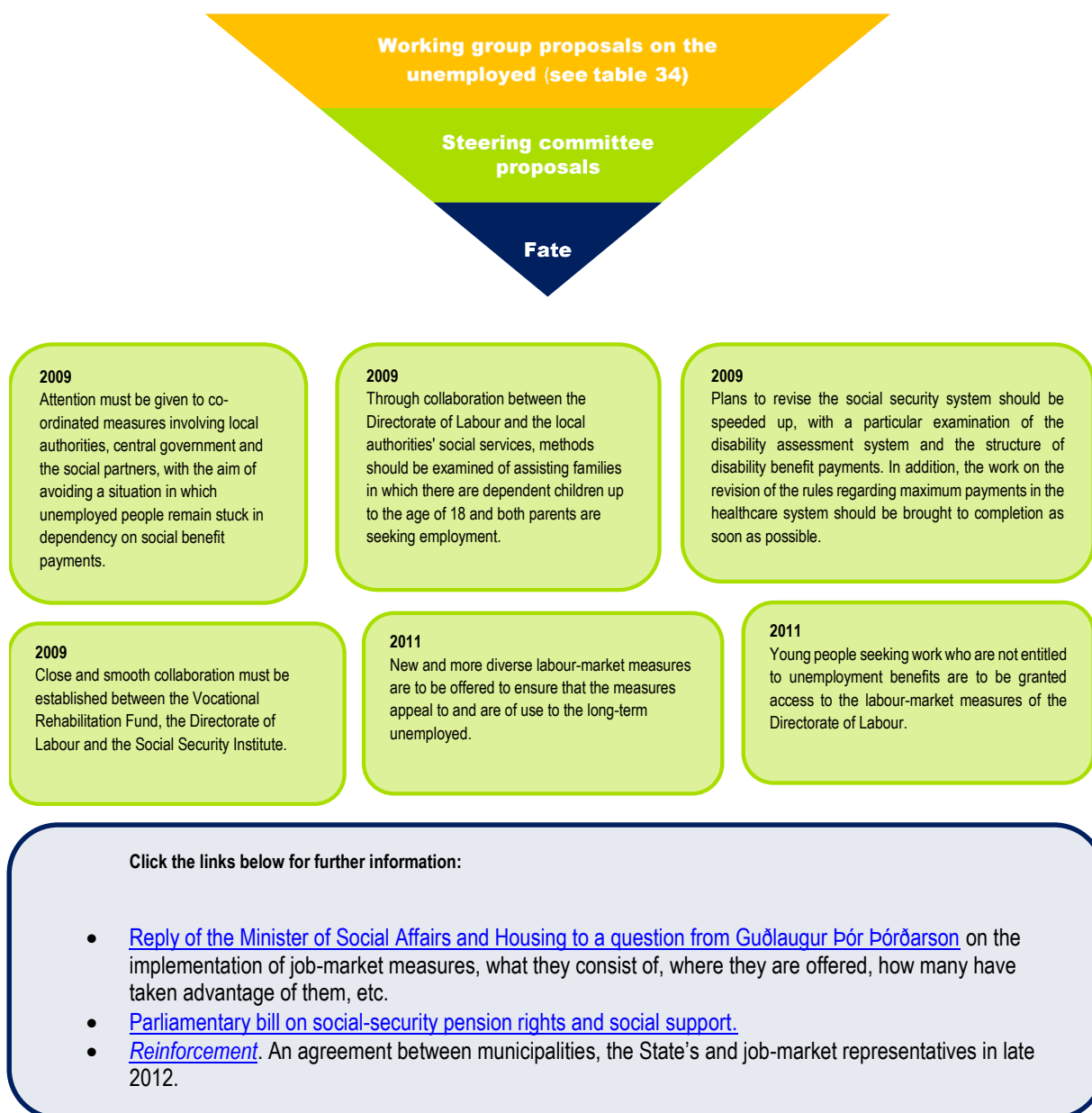
Interviewees from the Welfare Watch steering committee felt that the measures taken by the Directorate of Labour in the aftermath of the financial crisis were very similar to the proposals coming from the Welfare Watch (there was, after all, a representative of the Directorate of Labour in the Welfare Watch). They also felt that the Welfare Watch had played an important role in youth employment issues, although some admitted that the Directorate of Labour would of course have taken important action even if the Welfare Watch had not been around.

For instance, I think we influenced [...] certain measures regarding youth summer jobs and the project set up by the Directorate of Labour called *Youth Action*. [...] So I do think that quite a bit was achieved. Maybe there could have been more, though [a steering committee member].

Reykjavik City Council has also offered projects in line with the Welfare Watch's priority of having a variety of resources for unemployed people. *Energy* is a Reykjavik City Council project giving young people better access to career advisors who are in regular contact with employment seekers (Welfare Department, Reykjavik City Council, 2012).

One of the steering committee's proposals to the government was to foster close collaboration between the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund, the Directorate of Labour and the Social Security Institute. According to a steering committee report, work began in 2011 by bolstering co-operation between the Social Security Institute and the Directorate of Labour. The directors of these bodies had jointly looked into the interaction of their two benefit schemes (Ministry of Welfare, 2011).





(Sources: Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a, 2009b; Ministry of Welfare, 2011; Parliamentary Document 1116, 2012–13; Parliamentary Document 643, 2013–14)

**Figure 12. Steering committee's proposals for the period 2009–2013 related to the issues dealt with by the working group about unemployed people, together with what became of the proposals**

Household finances and debts were obviously in the spotlight in the first years after the financial crisis, and the government focused heavily on these issues. The final report of the steering committee indicates that it had proven difficult to give an overall assessment of how successful government measures regarding household finances had been, as there was no centralised database containing the relevant information (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a).

Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir indicated that several measures proposed by the Welfare Watch were implemented. The first report with proposals to the government was issued in March 2009. According to Ásta Ragnheiður, various measures for households in financial difficulties and other support actions for families in difficulties were launched based on these proposals. It is,

however, a matter of opinion how much success was achieved in this. For instance, one interviewee from the steering committee indicated that the Welfare Watch had discussed measures relating to household financial difficulties and put forward proposals to look into why fewer people had taken advantage of the measures than was expected and to review the measures so that more households might benefit from them. In this area, the interviewer felt that the Welfare Watch recommendations had not been adequately followed.

It was quite clear who was receiving assistance – middle income groups and above. So the people we were dealing with, i.e. people who hadn't yet had payment problems or exceeded 110% debt, but those who still had extremely pressing debt problems didn't get a penny. We were very critical of this, and we would have liked to have seen things dealt with differently [a steering committee member].

In this context, it should be noted that according to data available to the working group on household financial difficulties, far fewer had taken advantage of government measures than had been expected, particularly the “110% method” and debt adjustment. According to creditors, one reason for this was that some borrowers had been advised by the Homes Association of Iceland, the Association of Borrowers and others not to accept the measures in question while discussions on the recalculation of foreign-denominated loans were still ongoing in the courts (Ministry of Welfare, 2011a).

Figure 13 shows the steering committee's proposals on household debt problems for the period 2009–2013, as well as examples of the many measures for households and individuals in payment difficulties put forward by the government during this time.



**2009**

Solutions aimed at ameliorating the financial difficulties faced by households should be of a comprehensive nature, with the aim of creating a chain of solutions aimed at: a) helping those in the greatest difficulties, b) assisting those who are at risk and are likely to experience difficulties, c) supporting those who are still able to cope and who, through the simple actions of the authorities and creditors, can lower their payment burdens and thereby survive the difficulties that are likely to emerge in the next 1–2 years.

**2009**

The government should state clearly whether any further steps will be taken to address the position of those who are experiencing difficulty paying off exchange-rate-linked mortgages.

**2009**

The government should launch measures to help those who are in financial difficulty due to loans taken in foreign currencies to purchase automobiles.

**2009**

Measures adopted by the government to enable households in financial difficulties to tackle payment difficulties should be assessed and analysed regularly, with particular attention given to those who are in the worst positions. The measures should be revised if necessary.

**2009**

Measures should be launched to assist persons who are basically still able to cope but are potentially at risk of becoming ensnared in financial difficulties, in order to prevent an expansion of the group of persons in financial difficulty.

**2011**

The government is to ensure the adoption of a centralised database on the financial position of households in order to enable the analysis of the financial position and difficulties of households in a comprehensive manner.

**2011**

The government should form a working group to assess the authorities' measures as regards household debt problems. The working group should consist of independent experts who are to examine why significantly fewer took advantage of the measures than was anticipated in the report prepared by the group of experts on household debt problems in November 2010. The group should both assess the measures and submit proposals for improvements so that a greater number of households can reap the benefits.

**2013**

The government should speed up, as far as possible, the formulation of a comprehensive housing policy and then initiate an action plan for support to low-income families with housing problems.

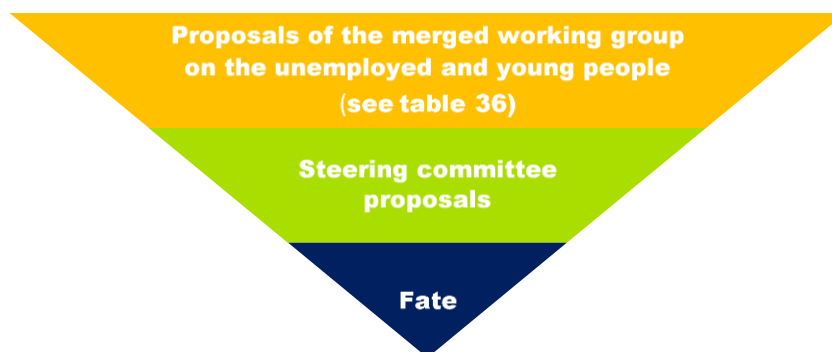
Click the links below for further information:

- [Debtors' Ombudsman Act.](#)
- [110% method: Act amending Act No. 44/1998 on housing issues, as amended \(reduction of Housing Financing Fund mortgage claims\).](#)
- [110% method – measures for over-mortgaged homes.](#)
- [Act on measures for individuals, households and companies in the aftermath of the bank and currency crash.](#)
- [Act on debt adjustment for individuals \(entered into force in 2010\).](#)
- [Act on temporary debt adjustment for real-estate mortgage claims for residential accommodation \(entered into force in 2009\).](#)
- [Reciprocal interactions that curtail benefits are to be abolished \(cf. amendments to legislation\)](#)
- [Amendments to the Act on Social Security](#)
- [Policy formulation. Association of Local Authorities in Iceland 2011-2014 \(e.g. Article 3.10. Housing issues\)](#)

(Sources: Association of Local Authorities, 2009; Ministry of Welfare, 2011d, 2011e)

**Figure 13. Steering committee's proposals for the period 2009–2013 related to the issues dealt with by the working group on household financial difficulties**

A joint group on unemployed people and young people began work in 2013. Based on the work of that group, the steering committee issued a proposal that year regarding co-operation between the Directorate of Labour and the municipalities. The proposal encourages the Minister of Welfare and municipality associations to promote ongoing co-operation in the development of professional rehabilitation measures for the long-term unemployed (see Figure 14). The proposal was made because the number of long-term unemployed people had increased despite an overall fall in unemployment five years after the financial crisis (Minister of Welfare, 2013a).



**2013**

The Minister of Welfare and municipality associations should promote ongoing co-operation in the development of professional rehabilitation measures for the long-term unemployed

Click the links below for further information:

- [Reply of the Minister of Social Affairs and Housing to a question from Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson](#) on the implementation of job-market measures, what they consist of, where they are offered, how many have taken advantage of them, etc.
- [Parliamentary bill on social-security pension rights and social support.](#)

(Sources: Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a, 2009b; Ministry of Welfare, 2011; Parliamentary Document 643, 2013–14; Parliamentary Document 1116, 2012–13)

**Figure 14. Steering committee's proposals for the period 2009–2013 relating to the issues dealt with by the joint group on unemployed people and young people**

### **Proposals from the Welfare Watch steering committee**

All of the steering committee's interim reports contained proposals emerging from the committee's meeting work. Figure 15 gives an overview of these proposals, many of which were successful, as indicated. The Welfare Watch's Counterbalance Fund was set up in 2009. According to Article 4 of the rules governing the Counterbalance Fund, 75% of the annual grant amount was to be used for initiatives, support for welfare service staff and work on social indicators and other necessary welfare projects. The remaining quarter was to be spent on co-ordinating projects run by the third sector and other necessary projects (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009e). A one-off call for projects to be financed from the Fund was made in the spring of 2010 (Hilma Hólmsfríður

Sigurðardóttir, in press), as indicated above in the discussion of Welfare Watch's most important projects.

Although some interviewees found it difficult to pinpoint whether the actions of the authorities were the direct consequence of the work of the Welfare Watch, social indicators were one easily identifiable example of something which had come about through the Welfare Watch. The proposal to develop social indicators was put forward in the Welfare Watch's first interim report in March 2009. As indicated earlier, Welfare Watch subsequently set up working groups on social indicators. According to the Chair of the Welfare Watch, Lára Björnsdóttir, the Watch worked on ensuring that social indicators would be further developed after the publication of the first report on social indicators in February 2012. The government decided to provide funds for the project, and in June 2012, the Ministry of Welfare and Statistics Iceland entered into an agreement for social indicators to be saved at Statistics Iceland, who would see to it that they would be updated regularly.

In my view, if the Welfare Watch had achieved nothing more than setting up social indicators, then it would have been worth it [Lára Björnsdóttir, former Chair of the Welfare Watch].

One of the steering committee's proposals to the government was that the steering committee should take steps to establish closer collaboration with the media. As discussed in the chapter on presentations and information provision, media people were contacted and the decision was made to foster co-operation between the media and the Welfare Watch. There was an idea to open an interactive website for children and teenagers, in co-operation with academics and media people, dealing with the financial crisis in a simple way, but this did not come to fruition. Another idea was to draft a checklist for the media to enable them to present content in a convenient way for vulnerable groups, e.g. as theatrical performances to make understanding the material easier or in primary schools to help children deal with their experiences of the financial crisis (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009a).

Another useful example of what happened to the steering committee proposals is the [www.island.is](http://www.island.is) website, which was set up to give the general public easier access to public services; the Welfare Watch had stressed the importance of finding ways to ensure effective means of providing information. The website is part of the Icelandic government's 2013–16 policy for the information society, *Internet-Driven Growth*.

The steering committee also proposed reducing the financial participation of people suffering from severe chronic illness. This proposal was made after a new co-payment system for medication purchases entered into force on 4 May 2013 in accordance with a legislative amendment passed by the Icelandic Parliament in June 2012. The objective of the legislation was to bring about a fairer co-payment system to cater to those who had high medication costs to cover, to simplify the system and to foster equality (Act amending the Act No. 122/2008 on Health Insurance, as amended). The new system turned out to be difficult for those in difficult financial situations. For instance, many recipients of disability pensions ended up having to pay more for medication and training than before the change (Minister of Welfare, 2013a). The study conducted

by Rúnar Vilhjálmsson in 2012 also showed that the general public's financial contribution for health services had increased in previous years, i.e. from 16.3% in 2000 to 18.2% in 2012. It also showed that this rise hit hardest low income groups in society with chronic and/or life-threatening diseases. A news article on budget changes for 2015 posted on the website of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs announced a 5% reduction in the personal financial contribution for medication costs with an extra state contribution of ISK 150 million (Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, 2014). At the time of this writing, it cannot be known if these announced changes will materialise.

Árni Páll Árnason, then Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security, entrusted the Welfare Watch with the task, in collaboration with the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities and the social partners, of maintaining the level of basic services provided by the local authorities. This was his response to the Welfare Watch steering committee proposal in this regard. One of the tasks of the Welfare Watch was to define the concept of “basic services”, a term which had been used extensively in the debate on streamlining and spending cuts. The Welfare Watch's report on basic services, published in December 2009, contained the recommendation that any streamlining measures that involved transfer of expenditure from the state to the municipalities should be avoided (Welfare Watch, 2009k). In her interview, Lára Björnsson, Chair of the Welfare Watch, referred specifically to this report when the discussion turned to whether or not the government could have followed the Welfare Watch's recommendations any better. Lára considers that such measures were embarked on despite the Welfare Watch's warnings.

Finally, the Welfare Watch has been reappointed by Eygló Harðardóttir, Minister of Social Affairs and Housing, led by Siv Friðleifsdóttir. The role of the new Welfare Watch is similar to that of the Welfare Watch 2009–2013 (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).



The table continues on the following page.

**Figure 15. Steering committee's proposals 2009–2013**

Click the links below for further information:

- [The Welfare Watch Counterbalance Fund was set up in 2009](#). Part of the fund was used for specific Welfare Watch projects, e.g. social indicators, development projects for measures for young unemployed people and co-ordination of voluntary-sector projects (Parliamentary Document 714, 2009–10).
  - [The rules governing the Counterbalance Fund can be found here](#).
- [Improve information provision of the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities and the municipalities](#) (Item 4.1 of the Policy Guidelines of the Association of Icelandic Local Authorities for 209 and 2010 – action plan).
- Work on [social indicators](#) began in 2009, when Welfare Watch put forward a proposal to put together Icelandic social indicators. [Statistics Iceland took on the task in 2012 of publishing and regularly updating social indicators](#), which are a collection of diverse statistical data on the social conditions of various groups in Iceland. [Debtors' Ombudsman Act](#) from 2010.
- [Health nursery schools](#) and [Health primary schools](#) under the Directorate of Health.
- Internet-driven growth – build, connect, participate: [State and municipal policy on the information society 2013-16](#).
- [Regulation on workplace learning and on-the job training](#).
- [Stability pact](#): The object of the pact is to promote the resurrection of the economy.
- [New Welfare Watch appointed by Eygló Harðardóttur](#).

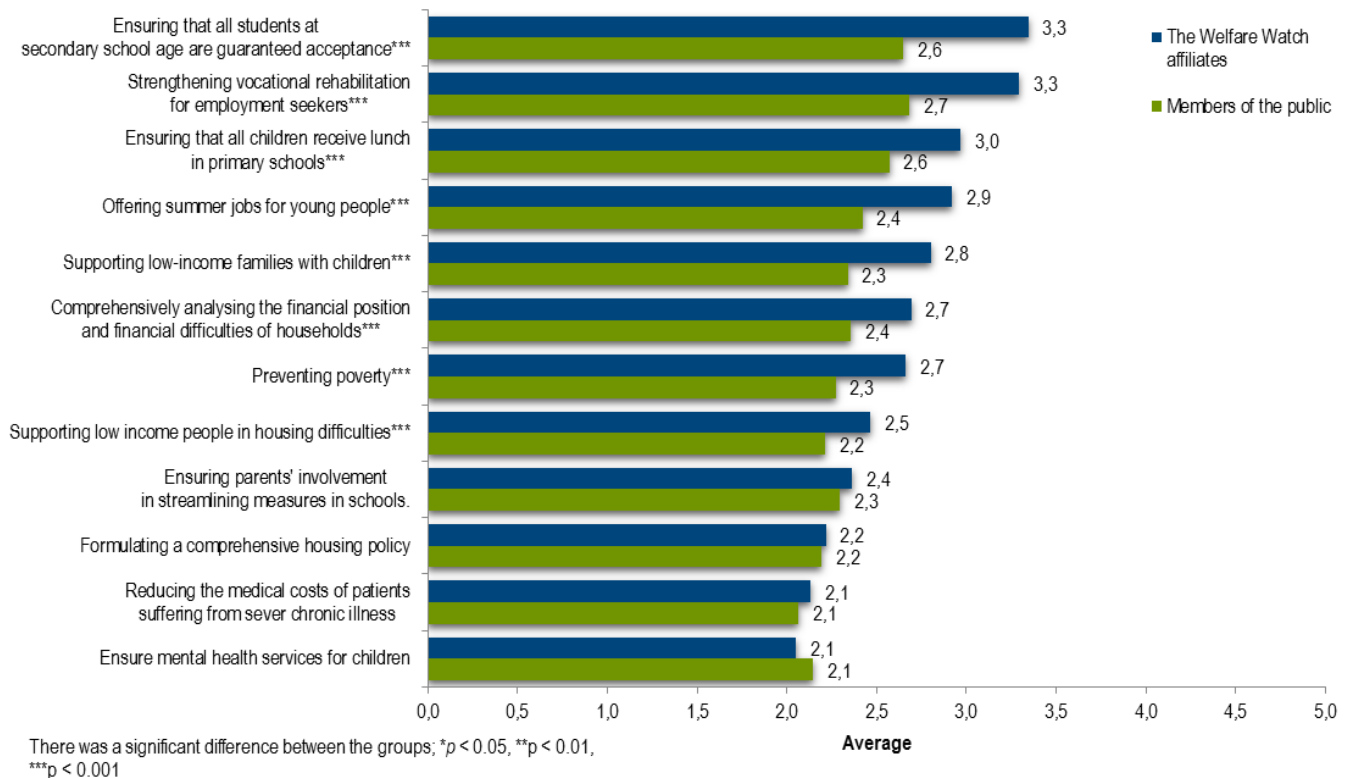
(Sources: The Directorate of Health, no date (a), no date (b); Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009e; Prime Minister's Office, 2010; Association of Icelandic Local Authorities, 2009; Ministry of Welfare, 2012b; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013; Ministry of Welfare, June 2014; Parliamentary Document 714, 2009–10)

**Figure 15 (cont'd). Steering committee's proposals 2009–2013**



### Attitudes towards the actions of public authorities

An online survey was given to members of the public and staff of organisations with representatives in the Welfare Watch (“affiliates”) to determine whether people outside the Welfare Watch felt that the government had implemented the Watch’s priorities. Respondents were asked whether they felt the government had put much, little or no emphasis on twelve welfare actions proposed by the Welfare Watch in its reports to the government. Figure 16 shows that people most commonly felt that the government had focused on ensuring all students admission to secondary school, improving professional rehabilitation for jobseekers, and ensuring lunches for all children in Iceland primary schools. It also shows a considerable difference between responses from affiliates and the general public. Affiliates were much more likely to be aware of government action in the areas focused on by the Welfare Watch.



**Figure 16. Attitudes of affiliates and the general public on whether the government has placed much, little or no emphasis on various welfare actions. Average scale of 1–5, where 1 is little or no emphasis and 5 is great emphasis**

### Other results from the work of the Welfare Watch

Interviewees and focus groups were of the opinion that the effects of the work of the Welfare Watch could be seen widely. Note was made of the fact that the Watch's work often had an indirect impact on welfare in Iceland by raising awareness about issues that require attention. Increased debate subsequently led to entities other than the government taking on such issues.

When such a large group, as we were, comes together with a variety of contact networks and backgrounds, it's able to call a great deal of attention to various issues and to follow up on such issues elsewhere. It is a bit like a spider's web. Someone begins and then someone else comes along and carries the issue forward [a member of the steering committee].

An example of the spinning of such a web was when dentists, dental assistants and dentistry students came together and offered free dental services for children from low income homes. One of the proposals issued by the Welfare Watch to authorities was to pay more attention to the dental care of children living in difficult social circumstances. One interviewee pointed out that as a result of the work of the Welfare Watch, the University of Iceland Faculty of Odontology and the Icelandic Dental Association of Iceland decided to offer their work free of charge for the benefit of children and youngsters.

This is an example of how people joined forces with us and ensured that such projects were implemented [a member of the Welfare Watch].

A interviewee from the Welfare Watch's working group, moreover, pointed out that a number of rehabilitation and confidence building measures had been initiated in the wake of the economic collapse. Although the Welfare Watch cannot be credited for implementing all these measures, they were the result of members of the Watch's steering committee or a working group calling attention to the fact that certain groups needed such measures. Others subsequently undertook responsibility for these projects.

Another example of a project that was executed by parties other than the government was an extensive survey into the circumstances of families with children in Reykjavík which the University of Iceland Social Science Research Institute and the Centre for Children and Family Research (ICE-CCFR) prepared at the request of the Reykjavik City Welfare Department. One of the goals of the survey was to compare the social and economic circumstances of parents in Reykjavík according to whether their income was in the form of paid employment, unemployment benefits or financial assistance. The survey, moreover, provided insights into the participation of children in Reykjavík in sports and leisure activities depending on the source of their parents' income (Ásdís Aðalbjörg Arnalds, Elísabet Karlsdóttir, Heiður Hrunn Jónsdóttir and Vala Jónsdóttir, 2012). The subject of the survey accords significantly with the focus of the Welfare Watch as regards issues pertaining to children and families with children. One of the proposals the steering committee submitted to the authorities was to investigate the circumstances of young families with children. The *working group that focused on children and families with children* strongly recommended that the participation of children in leisure activities be monitored and that they should be ensured access to sports and leisure activities irrespective of the financial standing of their parents. Reykjavík City had a representative in the Watch's steering committee, and so it is quite likely that the work done by the Welfare Watch found its way to the Reykjavik City Welfare Department.

As can be seen from the above, it is fair to surmise that the members of the Welfare Watch have presented the focal points of the Watch in the professional environment where they worked on a daily basis. This view was clearly expressed in interviews with members from the Watch's

steering committee, who were of the opinion that the Welfare Watch was of great value even if the authorities have not implemented all the group's ideas. The mere presentation of the Watch's focal points meant that public bodies and associations gained a better understanding of what groups needed special attention.

This allowed one to actually see what the situation was and where intervention was needed, and then I could forward this information to the trade unions. The unions received information on the situation and could implement the necessary actions and could each provide better services to their members [a member of the steering committee].

In an web survey among members of working groups, respondents gave their opinion of the manner in which reports issued by the working groups were of use in their professional environment and whether their work had been of use in their working environment and elsewhere. Table 38 shows that a large majority informed their colleagues about the work of the working group, with 82% of respondents agreeing with the statement. All those who worked in local authorities' social services or health services said they agreed, as did a large majority of those working for NGOs, as compared to a fewer number who worked in the education sector or in public bodies. In addition, responses differed according to whether they were members of the steering committee or not. All members of the steering committee agreed with the statement.














**Table 38. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – I informed my colleagues about the endeavours of the working group.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly or rather disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	42%	40%	10%	8%	72	82%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	31%	46%	11%	11%	35	77%
Female	51%	35%	8%	5%	37	86%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	47%	29%	12%	12%	17	76%
50–59 years	39%	44%	8%	8%	36	83%
60–68 years	42%	42%	11%	5%	19	84%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	75%	25%	0%	0%	12	100%
Education	33%	33%	7%	27%	15	67%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	36%	18%	9%	11	73%
Other public services	33%	44%	22%	0%	18	78%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	38%	56%	0%	6%	16	94%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	53%	47%	0%	0%	15	100%
Not a member of steering committee	40%	38%	11%	11%	55	78%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Almost 60% of respondents agreed that they had noticed the results of the working groups in their working environment. A quarter of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Women were likelier than men to notice the results in their working environment, and those who were also members of the Watch's steering committee said they were proportionally more often in agreement than those who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 39).














**Table 39. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – I noticed the results of the working groups in my professional environment.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	17%	41%	17%	11%	13%	70	 59%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	17%	29%	26%	17%	11%	35	 46%
Female	17%	54%	9%	6%	14%	35	 71%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	12%	35%	18%	24%	12%	17	 47%
50–59 years	25%	44%	14%	3%	14%	36	 69%
60–68 years	6%	41%	24%	18%	12%	17	 47%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	18%	45%	18%	0%	18%	11	 64%
Education	23%	31%	8%	15%	23%	13	 54%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	27%	36%	18%	18%	0%	11	 64%
Other public services	16%	37%	26%	11%	11%	19	 53%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	6%	56%	13%	13%	13%	16	 63%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	13%	67%	13%	0%	7%	15	 80%
Not a member of steering committee	19%	36%	15%	15%	15%	53	 55%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%














Almost 60% of respondents agreed that the report of the working group had been used in their professional environment, while a quarter of respondents disagreed with this statement. Women were more of the opinion that the group's reports were utilised in their professional environment. Participant responses differed according to age. Respondents aged over 50 were proportionally more often in agreement with the statement than respondents aged 24–49 years. There was a significant difference in responses depending on whether respondents were also members of the Watch's steering committee or not, as half of those who were not members agreed with the statement as compared to almost all those who were members of the steering committee (see Table 40).

**Table 40. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – The reports of the working group were utilised in my professional environment.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	21%	34%	20%	13%	11%	70	 56%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	12%	32%	24%	21%	12%	34	 44%
Female	31%	36%	17%	6%	11%	36	 67%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	18%	18%	29%	18%	18%	17	 35%
50–59 years	23%	46%	11%	9%	11%	35	 69%
60–68 years	22%	28%	28%	17%	6%	18	 50%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	64%	9%	9%	9%	9%	11	 73%
Education	8%	38%	31%	0%	23%	13	 46%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	33%	25%	17%	17%	8%	12	 58%
Other public services	17%	28%	33%	11%	11%	18	 44%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	0%	63%	6%	25%	6%	16	 63%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	25%	69%	0%	6%	0%	16	 94%
Not a member of steering committee	21%	25%	23%	15%	15%	52	 46%

Six of every ten participants in the web survey among the members of the working groups agreed that the results of the working groups were of use in their work elsewhere, while just under 20% said that the results had not been of use in their other work. Those who were engaged in public services in ministries and those working for local authorities agreed proportionately more often with the statement than those who worked elsewhere. Those who were also members of the steering committee were more likely to have noticed the results of the working groups in their work elsewhere than those who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 41).

**Table 41. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – The results of the working groups were of use in my work elsewhere.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	22%	38%	22%	10%	8%	72	 60%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	21%	38%	21%	12%	9%	34	 59%
Female	24%	37%	24%	8%	8%	38	 61%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	12%	29%	41%	18%	0%	17	 41%
50–59 years	25%	36%	19%	8%	11%	36	 61%
60–68 years	26%	47%	11%	5%	11%	19	 74%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	33%	25%	17%	25%	0%	12	 58%
Education	14%	36%	29%	0%	21%	14	 50%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	33%	42%	17%	0%	8%	12	 75%
Other public services	17%	44%	28%	0%	11%	18	 61%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	19%	38%	19%	25%	0%	16	 56%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	38%	38%	13%	13%	0%	16	 75%
Not a member of steering committee	19%	37%	24%	9%	11%	54	 56%

## The importance of the Welfare Watch

### ***The importance of the Welfare Watch for the government of Iceland***

Interviews with the three ministers who granted the first Welfare Watch its mandate revealed that the Watch had played an important role in their work. The Watch's reports primarily helped the authorities to prioritise tasks.

The main problem facing governments is that someone starts to say that a problem is of a certain nature, and then people start to assume that this a fact and start allocating large sums in that direction. The problem may, however, be of a completely different nature, or there may be more pressing problems elsewhere [Árni Páll Árnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

The debate in political work is where to direct funds, and the results of the Welfare Watch could be used as a tool in that struggle. By referring to the proposals prepared by a group working on a broad basis and which had not established a political party policy for itself, the minister was able to better argue why funds should be directed toward one particular project rather than any other.

Thus, a group was formed. It was not political, its members were appointed by dissimilar entities and it reached a consensus on results. And, when I, as minister, was fighting for funds, I could refer to these results, use them for support, so it mattered [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].











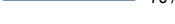


In the discussion on the importance of the Welfare Watch among members from the Watch's working groups, it was revealed that not all the proposals dealt with what actions the government should take, but rather some of the proposals were intended to protect specific groups from budget cuts. The importance of state and local government service institutions prioritising tasks in accordance with what are considered basic services and to ensure that such services are not reduced was pointed out. An interviewee from a working group said that the Welfare Watch had thereby provided local authorities with a tool that could be utilised in budgeting and was of the opinion that perhaps this work had resulted in fewer cutbacks in welfare matters than in other fields.

On the other hand, we saw in the figures from 2009, 2010 and 2011 that the municipalities cut construction almost completely to nil. So that [...] the fields that suffered the greatest cutbacks during budgeting were clearly these asset and construction fields [a member of a working group].

### ***The importance of the Welfare Watch for its members***

The importance of the Welfare Watch was also in the opportunities it provided for dissimilar public bodies and NGOs to work together. In an web survey among the members of the working groups, respondents were asked to provide an opinion of whether their participation in a working group had strengthened their professional contact network. A large majority of participants were of the opinion that their participation in the efforts of the working group had strengthened their contact network (73%). Those employed in the education and training sector experienced this less than those who were employed in other sectors (see Table 42).

**Table 42. To what extent do you agree or disagree that your participation in the working group has strengthened your professional contacts network?**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Rather disagree	Strongly disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	35%	38%	14%	5%	8%	74	 73%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	31%	44%	8%	8%	8%	36	 75%
Female	39%	32%	18%	3%	8%	38	 71%
<b>Age</b>							
24–49 years	28%	39%	22%	6%	6%	18	 67%
50–59 years	49%	27%	11%	5%	8%	37	 76%
60–68 years	16%	58%	11%	5%	11%	19	 74%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	42%	33%	8%	8%	8%	12	 75%
Education	25%	31%	19%	0%	25%	16	 56%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	45%	9%	9%	0%	11	 82%
Other public services	42%	37%	11%	11%	0%	19	 79%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	31%	44%	19%	0%	6%	16	 75%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>							
Member of steering committee	53%	40%	0%	0%	7%	15	 93%
Not a member of steering committee	32%	35%	18%	7%	9%	57	 67%

The interviews with members of the steering committee revealed that the establishment of the Watch had created a broad group of people who worked on welfare issues and that it had bridged the gap between public bodies and the third sector (NGOs). According to an interviewee from the steering committee, this co-operative venue was of great importance, as the subjects that public bodies deal with are often the same even if they are of different nature. It is not least in the field of welfare issues that there is a need for the co-operation of dissimilar entities, as the people who are at a disadvantage seldom have many resources to improve their position.

It is so important that the system manage to communicate because sometimes it appears as though each part is doing something in their own corner with its own problems, but then when they start to communicate with others, we find that everybody is dealing with similar problems [a member of the steering committee].

The interviewees from the working groups of the Welfare Watch agreed with the members of the steering committee that co-operation on a broad basis had made all the difference in their work to improve the conditions of the people in the country. One participant in the focus group said, for instance, that the contacts that formed in the establishment of the working groups had made it easier for him to contact people who could provide information useful to his work. Also revealed was the importance of people working on welfare issues receiving information on what actions the authorities had initiated to improve the circumstances that arose in the wake of the economic collapse.

So people received confirmation there at these meetings on what was happening. Lots of things are being done. That calms things a bit [a member of a working group].

Interviewees believed that they had learned a lot by working with dissimilar entities, exchanging ideas and sharing their own knowledge. It was pointed out that the people who were members of the Watch's steering committee had almost without fail attended all convened meetings, despite not being paid for the work. This fact was seen as an indication that participants saw a distinct advantage in taking part in the Welfare Watch. This collaboration was subsequently believed to have benefited the people who use welfare services as well as having benefited society as a whole.

All this work, the extensive exchange of ideas that occurred, will have a much greater long-term effect than we realise because it educated everyone involved in the Welfare Watch [a member of the steering committee].

The web survey among participants of the Welfare Watch's working groups revealed that a large majority, or 81%, were of the opinion that their contribution to the working group mattered. Women were more of this opinion than men, and all members of the steering committee agreed that their contribution mattered, as opposed to three of every four who were not members of the steering committee (see Table 43).

**Table 43. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – My contribution mattered in the working group.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly or rather disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	33%	48%	13%	6%	67	81%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	32%	42%	19%	6%	31	74%
Female	33%	53%	8%	6%	36	86%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	38%	38%	13%	13%	16	75%
50–59 years	41%	38%	15%	6%	34	79%
60–68 years	12%	76%	12%	0%	17	88%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	36%	36%	18%	9%	11	73%
Education	15%	46%	23%	15%	13	62%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	36%	45%	9%	9%	11	82%
Other public services	35%	53%	12%	0%	17	88%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	40%	53%	7%	0%	15	93%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	47%	53%	0%	0%	15	100%
Not a member of steering committee	30%	46%	16%	8%	50	76%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Participants were also proud of having participated in the work of the working group, with 77% agreeing with that statement. Approximately 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, and one out of every ten disagreed (see Table 44).



**Table 44. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? – I am proud to have taken part in the work of the working group.**

	Strongly agree	Rather agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly or rather disagree	Number	Strongly or rather agree
<b>Total</b>	44%	33%	14%	10%	73	77%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	37%	37%	17%	9%	35	74%
Female	50%	29%	11%	11%	38	79%
<b>Age</b>						
24–49 years	33%	33%	17%	17%	18	67%
50–59 years	54%	26%	11%	9%	35	80%
60–68 years	35%	45%	15%	5%	20	80%
<b>Field of employment</b>						
Municipal social services / Healthcare services	42%	25%	17%	17%	12	67%
Education	40%	33%	7%	20%	15	73%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	42%	42%	8%	8%	12	83%
Other public services	39%	39%	17%	6%	18	78%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	56%	25%	19%	0%	16	81%
<b>Membership of Welfare Watch steering committee</b>						
Member of steering committee	75%	19%	6%	0%	16	94%
Not a member of steering committee	36%	36%	15%	13%	55	73%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

### **The importance of the Welfare Watch for the general public in Iceland**

Interviews with the minister and members of the steering and working groups of the Welfare Watch revealed the view that the analysis of the Welfare Watch as to what impact the economic collapse had on the circumstances of different groups had the result of making the discourse on the negative effects of the collapse milder. Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare, for instance, said that he was convinced that the Welfare Watch was the reason why the debate about the economic collapse and its consequences had become more objective than it would otherwise have been. He believes that if the Watch had not been established, people would have been more likely to react by pointing fingers and issuing statements that could not be supported. One of the Welfare Watch's strengths was its analysis of the conditions in society and the manner in which it was able to provide information on the status of issues. An interviewee from a working group pointed out that with this analysis, the Watch was also able to raise awareness of a number of social aspects that would otherwise not have been discussed in the public forum.

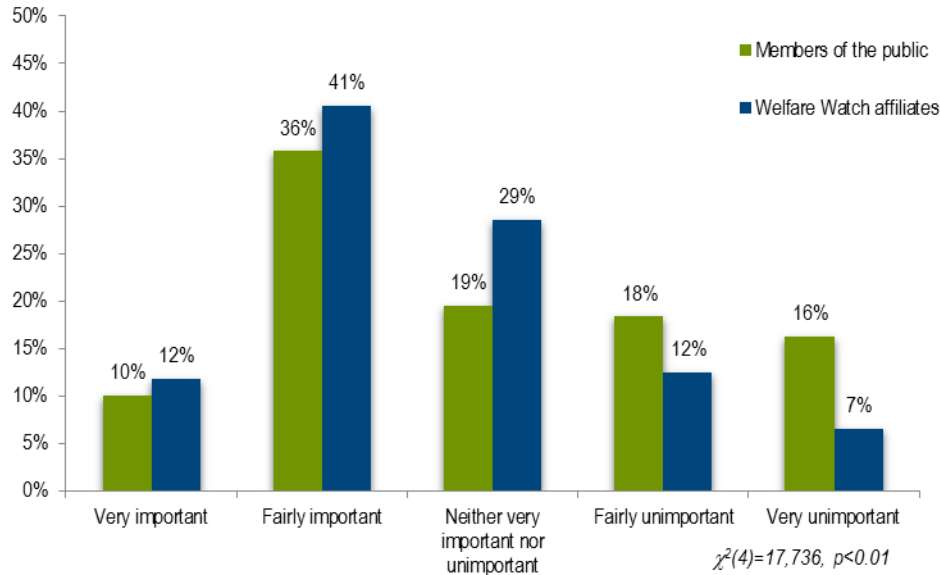
The Welfare Watch fostered speaking up for certain views which might possibly not have been taken seriously in the debate in the same manner if this venue had not been available [a member of a working group].

In light of how important a role the Welfare Watch is seen to have played in improving the welfare of people in Iceland, interviewees agreed that its continued existence needs to be ensured. The Welfare Watch was created during times of considerable turmoil, and interviewees all agreed that it would probably not have been created under different conditions. Nevertheless, the interviewees did not wish to regard the Watch as a tool that should only exist in time of economic turmoil, as it

does not matter what the circumstances in society are, as there are always some who are disadvantaged.

One has worked in welfare services during times of economic prosperity and seen that such prosperity does not always reach everyone. This is why there is always a need for something to point out to the authorities existing problems and shortcomings in the welfare services even if everything appears to be going swimmingly for the majority. Then it is important to have individuals and such a body that knows what is going on [Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security].

The importance of the Welfare Watch in Icelandic society was one of the questions in the web survey among the staff of public bodies who had a representative in the Watch and in a survey among the general public. Figure 17 shows that of the respondents that had heard of the Welfare Watch, approximately half were of the opinion that it had been important during the first few years after the economic collapse. The Watch's affiliates, i.e. the staff of public bodies involved in welfare matters, were much more inclined to believe that the Watch made a difference than the general public. Thus, a third of the general public believed that the Watch was of little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the collapse, while around 19% of those belonging to the group of affiliates were of the same opinion. More than a third of the public believed that the Watch made little difference, as compared to just under a fifth of the affiliates. A background analysis of the responses to the question may be found in Table iii in Annexes 1 and 2.



**Figure 17. Do you think that the Welfare Watch was of great or little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the economic collapse? – Comparison of the responses from affiliates and the general public.**

The respondents in the survey who said that the Welfare Watch was of importance as regards Icelandic society were asked why it was important. The question was an open question. The responses from affiliates have been categorised and are shown in Table 45. Table 46 shows the categorised answers of the general public. The tables show that the majority of both affiliates and the public were of the opinion that the importance was that the Welfare Watch analysed the status of welfare issues in Icelandic society and submitted proposals for remedies.

**Table 45. In your opinion, why was the Welfare Watch important for Icelandic society? – Responses of affiliates.**

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Further description</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Examples of comments</i>
<b>Map the situation and provide support for improvements</b>			
	Analyse the status of welfare issues, map services and point out what needs to be improved	52	"It provided an overview of the complicated problems that Icelanders were dealing with in the wake of the crisis, measured the general state of the nation. The Welfare Watch pointed out the difficulties various groups were experiencing and pointed out mitigating measures."
	Drawing the attention of the authorities to issues and providing them with checks.	23	"Representatives of those involved in welfare issues met and reviewed the situation. Act as a pressure group on members of parliament and ministers and draw attention to areas where actions are required."
	Monitor requirements and point out what needs to be improved	20	"To provide authorities with restraints in welfare issues and provide them with an overview of the status as current."
<b>Attending to the financial position and wellbeing of people</b>			
	Guarding people's interest and minimising social problems in the wake of the economic collapse	23	"Tackling the problems of people who were the most affected in the collapse and finding social solutions to prevent people from becoming marginalised."
	To monitor the effects of the economic collapse on household finances, peoples' finances and wellbeing	18	"The most important aspect was to closely monitor the manner in which the economic situation after the collapse had an effect on households. Particularly low-income households."
<b>Data collection and education</b>			
	That the Welfare Watch exists, the problem is recognised and a dialogue created	18	"Mainly to be visible and make sure people know that something is being done."
	To collect information on the consequences of the crisis	14	"Efforts spent to collect information in a single location – but no executive powers."
	To educate	9	"To gain an overview and to educate."
<b>Establish multidisciplinary co-operation</b>			
	Strengthening the ties of different service providers and harmonise actions	34	"By strengthening the collaboration of different administrative levels and groups toward a single and shared goal."

The Welfare Watch was also considered to have played a part in raising awareness of what groups needed attention after the economic collapse as regards their subsistence and wellbeing.

**Table 46. In your opinion, why was the Welfare Watch important for Icelandic society? – Responses from the public.**

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Further description</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Examples of comments</i>
<b>Map the situation and provide suggestions for improvements</b>			
	Analyse the status of welfare issues, map services and point out what needs to be improved	16	"Monitors welfare in society – should be able to provide good suggestions to the authorities as regards the problems faced."
	Analysing the situation – obtaining a comprehensive overview	4	"Assessing people's situation in general."
<b>Attending to the financial position and wellbeing of people</b>			
	Monitoring the wellbeing of children/families/employment seekers	11	"Monitoring the welfare of families." "Assisting the unemployed and those who are vulnerable."
	Attending to people in sensitive positions	6	"Helping those who were at a disadvantage before the crisis and who were in an even worse position after the crisis."
	Attending to Icelandic households in the wake of the economic crisis	3	"That households in Iceland were not left behind in the economic crisis."
<b>Raising awareness and providing checks</b>			
	Draw the attention of the authorities to issues relating to the welfare and quality of life of the population – provide checks	5	"Believe it had a good effect on the work and decision making processes of the Ministry of Welfare and the Minister."
	Raising awareness	1	"Raising public awareness."

Respondents to the survey who considered the Welfare Watch to have been of little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the economic collapse were asked why they felt the Watch was of little importance. The responses from affiliates have been categorised and are shown in Table 47. Table 48 shows the categorised answers of the general public. Quite a large proportion of the participants were of the opinion that the Watch was not a success. In this context, mention was made of the fact that the Watch did not have the correct tools to tackle the problem, that it lacked executive powers.

**Table 47. Why do you feel that the Welfare Watch was of little importance for Icelandic society? – Responses of affiliates.**

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Further description</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Examples of comments</i>
<b>Failed to achieve results</b>			
	The operation achieved little results – did not achieve its goals	22	"Has not achieved any results and did not have the tools to address the problem."
	The Watch's work did not involve any concrete actions	9	"Little or no funds were allocated to the actions that the Welfare Watch did recommend. "
	The Watch did not have any effect on government policies	8	"The decisions of the authorities as current have more often than not conflicted with the proposals presented as the Welfare Watch's recommendations, i.e. have been shaped by other interests in society."
	Conditions have not improved despite the work of the Watch	8	"Little has changed since the crash, so I cannot see what use it is when there have been little or no changes."
<b>Lacking transparency</b>			
	Transparency and information provision was lacking	16	"The work was not transparent, little or no debate."
<b>Contrivance</b>			
	Establishing the Welfare Watch was a contrived act	6	"When the conditions are as they are, the Welfare Watch acts as a pretty flower in the governments lapel: pretty and makes a few people happy but is useless in helping the crowd."

Also mentioned was the fact that conditions in society had not improved despite the existence of the Welfare Watch. Several mentioned that the Welfare Watch had not been sufficiently visible to the public.

**Table 48. Why do you feel that the Welfare Watch was of little importance for Icelandic society? – Responses from the public.**

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Further description</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Examples of comments</i>
<b>Failed to achieve results</b>			
	The operation achieved little results – did not achieve its goals	12	"The recommendations made by the Watch were insignificant, too late and mattered little."
	Conditions have not improved despite the work of the Watch	3	"No account taken of the high debts people had. Medical costs high, cost of medicines very high. Food prices are rising and nothing is being done. "
	The Watch did not have any effect on government policies	2	"Its work and recommendations not taken seriously."
<b>Lacking transparency</b>			
	Have not heard much about the work of the Welfare Watch	8	"Because I don't know much about and have not heard much – as a result, I conclude that it is not doing what it is supposed to."
	Transparency and information provision was lacking	3	"Have not seen any improvement that can be traced to the Watch. People should better informed about its work."
<b>Contrivance</b>			
	Establishing the Welfare Watch was an act of contrivance	3	"As with all other projects/groups/committee appointments established to pretend something outwardly ... failed to make any difference."

## CONCLUSION

### Establishment of the Welfare Watch

The establishment of the Welfare Watch was one of the first tasks of Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir when she became the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security. This first Welfare Watch in Iceland's history was operational from February 2009 to December 2013. Lára Björnsdóttir was the Chairman of the Welfare Watch, and Ingibjörg Broddadóttir and Þorbjörn Guðmundsson were its employees. The Chairman of the Watch had the responsibility of deciding who belonged in the Watch's steering committee in consultation with the Minister and the permanent secretary. Contact was made with public bodies, companies and NGOs requesting their participation in the Welfare Watch by means of a formal letter from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security. The response was good, seeing that people were concerned about the Icelandic society in the wake of the economic collapse. The steering committee originally consisted of fifteen members. The group slowly grew, and when this first Welfare Watch ended, 22 public bodies or NGOs had representatives in the steering committee of the Welfare Watch.

The members of the steering committee made their own decisions on what issues to address in the Welfare Watch. Soon after the establishment of the Watch, the group sought information from the municipalities on the extent to which social services had become aware of the effects of the economic recession. Also sought were the opinions of the municipalities as regards what issues the Watch should focus on in their work (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Security, 2009d). The Watch's focus was very much in tune with the requests made by the social services, as the steering committee had focused specifically on the affairs of children and families with children. Interviews with the minister who granted the Watch its mandate and members from the steering committee revealed the general popularity of the focus areas selected by the Watch.

Working groups for specific issues were created. These included the groups *Youngsters and young adults* and *Unemployed people*. Steering committee members chaired the working groups, and the field of interest and expert knowledge of each governed which group each chaired. The selection of people into the working groups was left to the chairs of the working groups. According to interviewees from the steering committee, they sought to recruit the professionals and affiliates they felt belonged to the group. The working groups changed during the period that the Watch operated in that some were disbanded and new groups were added.

### Role and goals of the Welfare Watch

The purpose of the Welfare Watch was to monitor the social and financial consequences of the economic collapse for homes in Iceland and to submit proposals and opinions to the authorities (Ministry of Welfare, 2013a). A survey among the members of working groups contained questions on the extent to which the role of the Watch had been achieved. A large majority, or 84%, stated that monitoring the social, as well as financial, consequences of the economic crisis on Icelandic families and households had been successful. The respondents were not as positive as regards

how successful the Watch had been in submitting proposals for improvements, as two out of every three said that the Watch had been successful and a quarter said that the Watch had been neither successful nor unsuccessful.

The survey among the members of the working groups asked about the role of the working groups. The majority (77%) said that the role of the working group had always been or had usually been well defined, and approximately 70% felt that their role was always or usually well defined. One can say, therefore, that overall the participants thought that the role of the working groups was clear. Some interviewees who participated in the discussions of focus groups, however, felt that it was unclear what was expected of the group they belonged to and what their work was to result in. In this context, it should be kept in mind that the focus groups only contained people who had participated in working groups and had not been members of the steering committee. The survey covered all members of working groups irrespective of whether or not they had also been members of the steering committee. In general, the respondents of the survey who had also been members of the steering committee were more positive than other respondents. Thus, for example, all the respondents in the survey who were members of the steering committee were of the opinion that the role of the working group was always or nearly always well defined, as opposed to 70% of those who were not members of the steering committee. These results indicate that in some cases, the role of the groups should have been better explained to the people who were selected as members of the Watch's working groups.

The survey among the members of the working groups also contained questions on the extent to which the objectives set by the working groups had been achieved. Two of every three said that achieving the group's objectives had gone well, while a quarter said that it had neither gone well or poorly, or that there had been difficulties. The most common reason given for difficulties in achieving the objectives was ineffective work practices and co-operation difficulties.

## Proposals made by the Welfare Watch

Each working group prepared status reports containing proposals for improvements. The working groups, however, submitted their proposals in a dissimilar fashion. Some proposals were generally worded and unclear. In this context, mention can be made of a proposal that children should be listened to in homes, institutions and in the media and that attention should be paid to those wanting to return to the labour market after a break and who have little or no entitlement to benefits. An interviewee from a working group mentioned that it had been difficult to reach a consensus on some subjects that were discussed in the group's meetings, and as a result, it had proved difficult to present clear recommendations for improvements.

The steering committee subsequently took the reports and proposals of the working groups for discussion and used them as the basis for the steering committee's progress reports. A survey among members of working groups asked their opinion of the steering committee's selection of the proposals of the working groups in the report of the steering committee. The majority, or 75% of

members, were satisfied with the steering committee's selection. A rather substantial proportion, however, was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (19%), and 6% were dissatisfied.

In its progress reports, the steering committee submitted proposals for improvements that were submitted to the authorities. There were no guarantees, however, that the authorities would implement the recommendations of the Watch, as the Welfare Watch had no executive powers. In general, however, most interviewees could identify some actions implemented by the authorities that accorded with what the Welfare Watch had proposed, although it can be difficult to pinpoint whether the actions of the authorities were the direct consequence of the work of the Welfare Watch. An interviewee from the Watch's working group found this to be a disadvantage and pointed out that the Welfare Watch had done excellent work but that its members did not know what this work would be used for.

An analysis of the material on the website of the Alþingi indicates that much of what the Welfare Watch recommended has been implemented, and one can, therefore, infer that the work carried out by the Welfare Watch has made a huge difference. The results of the survey among the public and stakeholders as to what aspect they felt that the authorities have focused on are in accordance with this analysis, as the authorities appear to have focused on strengthening vocational rehabilitation. In addition, the Welfare Watch itself implemented its recommendation to ensure lunch was served in primary schools by sending out letters to such effect to the municipal school boards. As stated previously, however, it is difficult to definitively say whether the actions of the authorities and other public bodies and associations in society are because of the work of the Welfare Watch or because these actions would have been implemented in any case.

## Communications and co-operation

Interviewees from the Welfare Watch's steering committee agreed that co-operation within the group had been excellent, and they also expressed their satisfaction with communications with the chairman of the Welfare Watch. Likewise, the majority of participants in the Watch's working groups were satisfied with the co-operation with others in the working group, or 78%. It was revealed, however, that the flow of information between the steering committee and the working groups could have been better, as over a fifth of the respondents in the survey who were members of the working groups were dissatisfied with the information flow between the steering committee and the working groups. This applied to half of the respondents who were not members of the steering committee. The same view was expressed by the focus groups amongst people who had participated in the activities of the working groups of the Watch. It was also revealed that on one occasion, the steering committee called the working groups together for a meeting to make preparations for writing a report. Such a meeting was only convened once but was seen as extremely important to strengthen the ties between the members of the working groups and the steering committee and also to ensure that the members of the working groups gained a better understanding of what was expected of them.



## Working procedures and results

Overall, two of every three participants in the survey among the members of the working groups were satisfied with the work of the working groups, a fifth were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and approximately 14% were dissatisfied. The members of the working groups were also asked whether they would have liked to have had the organisation and the procedures of the group be any different. A proportion of the group called for more targeted group management, better clarification of the group's role and better definition of the role of those participating in the group's work. Respondents in focus groups indicated that the division of tasks in the working groups had been unclear. The survey among working groups revealed that 57% of participants in the working group were satisfied with the manner in which the group allocated tasks among themselves, and a third were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

According to interviewees from the working groups, the workload was sometimes unevenly apportioned; stronger task management might have increased the effectiveness of the members. In addition, interviewees indicated that fatigue had begun to be felt among the members of the working groups as their work progressed. Accounts from members also indicated that the results could have been improved by delineating the issues discussed by each working group. Interviewees from the working groups said that in retrospect, it might have been better to further divide the working groups, as the intention had been to discuss a great deal of material. Also revealed was the fact that there were material overlaps between working groups, as different groups addressed the same issues. The working groups worked independently of each other, and there were no communications between them. Employment issues, for instance, were discussed by several groups, as was children's dental health. An interviewee from a working group stated that it might have been useful to have an employee who would meet with all the working groups and share information between them. Such an employee would then have been able to define the discussions and increase the productivity of the working groups.

The productivity of the Watch was at its peak during its first few years of operation. This was when the greatest number of resolutions, proposals and recommendations were issued by the Watch. The original objective of the Watch was to submit a progress report to the minister every three months, although this was not achieved. The working groups, moreover, were at their most active in the beginning. An examination of their proposals shows how many of them are from the first year the Watch operated. This is an interesting fact in light of the statements of interviewees to the effect that the working groups became ever more fatigued as the Watch's work progressed. It could also be argued, however, that the dynamic work of the Watch at the beginning was in response to the economic recession and that as Icelandic society began to recover, there was less need for many proposals and resolutions on the manner in which to prevent the economic recession impacting on specific groups.

## The Watch's visibility

When Guðbjartur Hannesson took over the position of Minister of Health and Social Security (subsequently Minister of Welfare), he renewed the mandate of the Welfare Watch with a new letter of instruction. There were several shifts of focus in the new letter, which contained instructions that the Welfare Watch was to *disclose information to the government and the public in a meaningful way* (Ministry of Welfare, e.d.-a).

Approximately half of the members of the working groups agreed that the work of the Welfare Watch had been well promoted within Icelandic society, while a little less than a third neither agreed nor disagreed. A survey among the general public revealed that a quarter had heard about the Welfare Watch, as compared to 80% of the Watch's affiliates that responded to the same question.

The people in the steering committee, therefore, had a role to play in informing the public bodies it was representing about the focus of the Watch and its main subjects. A quarter of the affiliates who had heard about the Watch were well informed about its work. The interviewees from the Watch's working groups also regarded this as their role. A large majority of working group members (82%) considered themselves to have fulfilled their duty and informed their colleagues about the work of the groups. Fewer were aware of the results of the work of the working groups in their working environment (58%) or aware if the reports of the working groups had been utilised in their professional environment (56%).

## The importance of the Welfare Watch

The Welfare Watch was considered to play an important role for the government. The importance involved providing the authorities with access to information and in providing advice as to where cutbacks were possible. Guðbjartur Hannesson, the former Minister of Welfare, mentioned, for instance, that the Watch had consisted of people from numerous dissimilar public bodies or associations which already spent both time and money on examining urgent issues within the welfare system. This meant there was access to information from people who had a broad range of knowledge, something that would not otherwise have been obtained.

The results of the work of the Welfare Watch can be seen in various places in society. One could point out that many of the actions taken by the government during the years between 2009 and 2013 are in accordance with the proposals submitted by the Welfare Watch. Interviewees also stated that they had seen entities other than the government adopt the issues addressed by the Watch. In this context, it was of paramount importance that members of the Watch had informed their colleagues and the public about the activities of the Welfare Watch. An example of this is when dentistry students began offering free dental services for children from low-income homes after the Watch focused on the necessity of attending to the dental needs of children living in difficult social circumstances. The members of the Welfare Watch generally appear to have informed their colleagues of the work carried out by the Watch, and 82% of respondents among the members of the working groups said that they had informed their colleagues about the work of the groups. Approximately two out of every three respondents stated that they had noticed the

results of the working groups in their work environment. Then there are the indirect effects of the Watch where public bodies have adopted projects, although the Watch cannot be directly credited for such adoption.

Participation in the Watch was also important for the strengthening of multidisciplinary co-operation in the field of welfare, and 73% of the respondents in the survey among the members of the working groups stated that they had strengthened their professional contacts network as a result. The majority of the members (80%) said that their contribution in the working groups mattered and that they were proud of their participation in the Welfare Watch.

## Looking to the future

Interviewees agreed that the Watch could hardly have come into existence if it hadn't have been for the sharp changes in Icelandic society at the time. The interviews revealed that the Welfare Watch played an important role in reacting to the economic collapse. A member of a working group, however, did submit the view that the work of Watch was characterised as being reactive and that if Iceland should continue to operate a Welfare Watch, then its objectives needed to be part of a comprehensive strategy for welfare. It is clear that the Welfare Watch was established during a time of considerable turmoil in Icelandic society. The Watch developed and changed as time passed given that efforts were being made to react to circumstances that people had not previously experienced. It is quite normal for a group created as a reaction to an economic collapse to change over time, seeing that there is more than a single issue to address. Reactions were required in many fields, and the interest of many different groups needed to be guarded.

If a Welfare Watch is to be appointed to monitor welfare issues and prevent certain groups from falling by the wayside in society, attention must be paid to the manner in which it can be provided with clear framework. For instance, it would be a good idea to define at the very beginning the role of each member of the working groups and steering committee, the manner in which information is to be disseminated and the manner in which people can monitor the results of their work.

## ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES IN THE SURVEY AMONG AFFILIATES

**Table i.** *Have you heard about the Welfare Watch?*

	Yes	No	Number	Yes, have heard about The Welfare Watch
<b>Total</b>	79%	21%	737	79%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	82%	18%	194	82%
Female	78%	22%	543	78%
<b>Age</b>				
22–39 years	69%	31%	134	69%
40–49 years	76%	24%	196	76%
50–59 years	84%	16%	258	84%
60–79 years	85%	15%	149	85%
<b>Field of employment</b>				
Local authorities' social services.	92%	8%	63	92%
Healthcare services	66%	34%	47	66%
Education	74%	26%	286	74%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	87%	13%	109	87%
Other public services	78%	22%	96	78%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	92%	8%	60	92%
Other sector or outside labour market	69%	31%	48	69%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table ii.** *How familiar or unfamiliar are you with the work of the Welfare Watch?*

	Very familiar	Rather familiar	Neither familiar nor unfamiliar	Rather unfamiliar	Very unfamiliar	Number	Very or rather familiar
<b>Total</b>	5%	22%	37%	26%	10%	581	27%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	6%	23%	30%	27%	14%	159	29%
Female	5%	22%	40%	26%	8%	422	26%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	5%	15%	35%	34%	10%	91	21%
40–49 years	5%	26%	34%	22%	11%	148	32%
50–59 years	2%	21%	41%	27%	8%	216	24%
60–79 years	8%	24%	34%	24%	10%	126	32%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	7%	28%	33%	28%	5%	58	34%
Healthcare services	3%	16%	29%	32%	19%	31	19%
Education	1%	18%	39%	28%	14%	212	19%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	7%	28%	34%	28%	3%	94	35%
Other public services	8%	20%	44%	23%	5%	75	28%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	11%	35%	35%	11%	9%	55	45%
Other sector or outside labour market	3%	15%	33%	33%	15%	33	18%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table iii.** *Do you think that the Welfare Watch was of great or little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the economic crisis?*

	Very important	Rather important	Neither important nor unimportant	Rather unimportant	Very little or no importance	Number	Very or rather important
<b>Total</b>	12%	41%	29%	12%	7%	441	52%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	7%	37%	33%	14%	9%	114	44%
Female	13%	42%	27%	12%	6%	327	55%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	15%	35%	27%	15%	8%	62	50%
40–49 years	15%	34%	29%	15%	6%	112	49%
50–59 years	9%	44%	31%	9%	6%	169	53%
60–79 years	11%	45%	23%	13%	7%	98	56%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	15%	42%	29%	12%	2%	52	58%
Healthcare services	9%	39%	22%	22%	9%	23	48%
Education	10%	47%	29%	9%	5%	152	57%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	8%	30%	33%	21%	8%	73	38%
Other public services	5%	49%	26%	12%	7%	57	54%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	24%	40%	20%	9%	7%	45	64%
Other sector or outside labour market	20%	20%	36%	16%	8%	25	40%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table iv.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on trying to prevent poverty?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	6%	23%	21%	31%	19%	743	29%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	9%	27%	22%	25%	17%	194	36%
Female	5%	22%	21%	33%	20%	549	27%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	3%	18%	24%	34%	21%	128	21%
40–49 years	4%	24%	20%	32%	20%	196	28%
50–59 years	7%	23%	22%	31%	17%	267	30%
60–79 years	10%	26%	17%	27%	20%	150	36%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	6%	27%	19%	34%	14%	64	33%
Healthcare services	2%	9%	30%	36%	23%	47	11%
Education	5%	25%	19%	30%	20%	293	30%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	8%	25%	28%	24%	14%	106	34%
Other public services	4%	20%	14%	43%	19%	95	24%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	18%	27%	20%	23%	12%	60	45%
Other sector or outside labour market	2%	22%	24%	26%	26%	46	24%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table v. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on supporting low-income families with children?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	7%	29%	18%	29%	17%	743	36%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	11%	34%	20%	22%	14%	195	45%
Female	6%	27%	17%	31%	19%	548	33%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	5%	29%	16%	34%	16%	125	34%
40–49 years	6%	30%	17%	28%	19%	199	36%
50–59 years	8%	30%	17%	29%	16%	265	38%
60–79 years	11%	26%	20%	26%	18%	152	36%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	8%	32%	15%	29%	15%	65	40%
Healthcare services	4%	17%	19%	36%	23%	47	21%
Education	7%	28%	18%	29%	19%	292	34%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	12%	33%	20%	27%	8%	107	45%
Other public services	4%	28%	17%	34%	17%	96	32%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	16%	31%	16%	21%	15%	61	48%
Other sector or outside labour market	4%	29%	18%	27%	22%	45	33%

**Table vi. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on supporting low-income people with housing problems?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	5%	19%	19%	31%	26%	738	24%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	6%	24%	19%	31%	21%	196	30%
Female	4%	18%	19%	32%	27%	542	22%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	3%	17%	20%	32%	28%	127	20%
40–49 years	3%	23%	18%	33%	24%	195	26%
50–59 years	5%	19%	18%	31%	27%	265	24%
60–79 years	7%	18%	21%	29%	25%	149	26%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	3%	26%	17%	28%	26%	65	29%
Healthcare services	2%	15%	17%	38%	28%	47	17%
Education	5%	19%	19%	32%	26%	286	23%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	7%	24%	15%	33%	21%	105	30%
Other public services	4%	16%	19%	34%	27%	96	20%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	8%	15%	34%	22%	20%	59	24%
Other sector or outside labour market	2%	28%	15%	28%	28%	47	30%

**Table vii.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on reducing the medical expenses of patients struggling with severe, chronic diseases?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	3%	12%	17%	29%	38%	716	15%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	4%	11%	24%	33%	29%	189	14%
Female	3%	12%	15%	27%	42%	527	16%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	2%	12%	20%	31%	36%	118	14%
40–49 years	3%	13%	13%	28%	43%	194	16%
50–59 years	4%	8%	19%	31%	39%	259	12%
60–79 years	6%	15%	20%	25%	35%	143	20%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	5%	10%	8%	40%	37%	62	15%
Healthcare services	2%	4%	13%	36%	45%	47	6%
Education	4%	11%	18%	27%	40%	280	15%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	5%	17%	18%	34%	26%	102	22%
Other public services	2%	11%	19%	28%	40%	94	13%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	5%	14%	27%	20%	34%	56	20%
Other sector or outside labour market	0%	12%	19%	19%	51%	43	12%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table viii.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring that all children are provided with lunch in Icelandic primary schools?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	11%	30%	24%	17%	19%	665	40%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	8%	27%	28%	18%	19%	167	35%
Female	12%	31%	23%	16%	19%	498	42%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	6%	27%	29%	15%	23%	98	33%
40–49 years	11%	28%	20%	20%	20%	181	39%
50–59 years	10%	27%	27%	18%	19%	242	36%
60–79 years	15%	39%	22%	11%	13%	142	54%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	11%	34%	23%	16%	16%	56	45%
Healthcare services	10%	23%	28%	21%	18%	39	33%
Education	12%	32%	22%	17%	18%	278	44%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	8%	34%	27%	12%	18%	99	42%
Other public services	9%	21%	29%	22%	20%	82	29%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	16%	16%	24%	26%	18%	50	32%
Other sector or outside labour market	6%	32%	21%	9%	32%	34	38%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table ix. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring mental health services for children?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	3%	9%	18%	31%	39%	677	12%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	3%	9%	27%	31%	30%	178	12%
Female	3%	8%	15%	31%	42%	499	11%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	1%	9%	19%	30%	40%	99	10%
40–49 years	2%	10%	13%	28%	47%	188	12%
50–59 years	3%	7%	21%	31%	38%	245	10%
60–79 years	5%	9%	21%	34%	31%	143	14%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	6%	5%	20%	30%	39%	64	11%
Healthcare services	2%	9%	23%	28%	37%	43	12%
Education	2%	7%	16%	32%	43%	275	9%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	3%	13%	18%	31%	36%	95	16%
Other public services	2%	10%	16%	35%	37%	82	12%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	4%	13%	24%	27%	33%	55	16%
Other sector or outside labour market	0%	11%	28%	19%	42%	36	11%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table x. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on formulating a comprehensive policy for housing issues?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	2%	13%	22%	29%	34%	717	16%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	4%	11%	21%	26%	38%	192	15%
Female	2%	14%	22%	30%	32%	525	16%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	3%	13%	18%	35%	29%	119	17%
40–49 years	1%	17%	20%	28%	34%	192	18%
50–59 years	3%	11%	21%	31%	34%	258	14%
60–79 years	3%	13%	27%	22%	35%	146	16%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	3%	10%	24%	36%	26%	58	14%
Healthcare services	2%	5%	14%	34%	45%	44	7%
Education	2%	15%	22%	26%	35%	282	16%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	2%	17%	21%	30%	29%	103	19%
Other public services	0%	15%	20%	29%	35%	93	15%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	7%	12%	29%	26%	26%	58	19%
Other sector or outside labour market	4%	13%	17%	24%	41%	46	17%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%



**Table xi. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on comprehensively analysing the financial situation of households?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	6%	28%	20%	22%	24%	727	34%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	11%	25%	21%	18%	25%	194	36%
Female	4%	29%	20%	23%	24%	533	33%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	8%	33%	20%	21%	18%	122	41%
40–49 years	5%	27%	16%	24%	27%	197	32%
50–59 years	5%	27%	20%	23%	25%	255	32%
60–79 years	7%	27%	25%	18%	24%	151	34%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	6%	28%	16%	20%	30%	64	34%
Healthcare services	2%	20%	22%	29%	27%	45	22%
Education	4%	26%	18%	25%	27%	285	30%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	8%	32%	22%	23%	15%	106	41%
Other public services	5%	30%	22%	19%	23%	94	35%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	11%	38%	21%	13%	18%	56	48%
Other sector or outside labour market	7%	30%	20%	18%	25%	44	36%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xii. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring that all students at the age of secondary school level are guaranteed a place in school?**

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	14%	40%	24%	13%	10%	700	53%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	13%	40%	26%	13%	8%	189	52%
Female	14%	40%	23%	13%	10%	511	53%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	5%	36%	33%	14%	12%	110	42%
40–49 years	11%	41%	26%	13%	10%	188	52%
50–59 years	18%	40%	22%	12%	9%	250	57%
60–79 years	17%	39%	21%	13%	9%	150	56%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	10%	32%	29%	19%	10%	59	42%
Healthcare services	10%	33%	26%	19%	12%	42	43%
Education	15%	40%	22%	12%	12%	286	55%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	18%	38%	25%	14%	4%	99	57%
Other public services	7%	49%	27%	12%	6%	90	56%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	22%	40%	18%	13%	7%	55	62%
Other sector or outside labour market	10%	37%	34%	12%	7%	41	46%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xiii.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on offering summer jobs for young people?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	9%	29%	24%	20%	18%	716	38%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	8%	31%	28%	19%	15%	189	39%
Female	9%	29%	23%	20%	19%	527	38%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	9%	38%	19%	19%	15%	117	47%
40–49 years	7%	26%	23%	21%	22%	189	34%
50–59 years	8%	30%	23%	20%	18%	261	38%
60–79 years	12%	26%	31%	19%	12%	147	37%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	12%	27%	17%	30%	15%	60	38%
Healthcare services	4%	11%	41%	22%	22%	46	15%
Education	8%	25%	24%	21%	22%	291	32%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	11%	43%	19%	21%	7%	101	53%
Other public services	5%	38%	24%	17%	15%	94	44%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	13%	30%	28%	13%	15%	53	43%
Other sector or outside labour market	10%	34%	22%	15%	20%	41	44%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xiv.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on strengthening vocational rehabilitation for people seeking employment?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	9%	44%	22%	15%	9%	718	54%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	9%	42%	26%	14%	9%	192	51%
Female	10%	45%	21%	15%	10%	526	55%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	9%	41%	23%	17%	11%	123	50%
40–49 years	9%	43%	21%	16%	11%	184	52%
50–59 years	9%	46%	23%	13%	10%	261	55%
60–79 years	12%	44%	23%	14%	7%	148	56%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services.	10%	51%	14%	17%	8%	63	60%
Healthcare services	7%	35%	30%	19%	9%	43	42%
Education	9%	44%	26%	13%	9%	276	53%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	9%	53%	19%	14%	5%	105	62%
Other public services	9%	45%	20%	17%	8%	98	54%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	19%	29%	22%	16%	14%	58	48%
Other sector or outside labour market	11%	38%	18%	16%	18%	45	49%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xv.** *Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on involving parents when streamlining measures are applied in schools?*

	Very great effort	Fairly great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	Number	Very or fairly great effort
<b>Total</b>	3%	11%	34%	25%	28%	633	14%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	4%	5%	38%	25%	28%	170	9%
Female	2%	13%	32%	25%	28%	463	15%
<b>Age</b>							
22–39 years	3%	12%	35%	26%	24%	93	15%
40–49 years	2%	11%	31%	21%	35%	179	13%
50–59 years	2%	8%	36%	27%	27%	229	10%
60–79 years	5%	16%	32%	25%	22%	131	21%
<b>Field of employment</b>							
Local authorities' social services	2%	13%	38%	15%	32%	47	15%
Healthcare services	0%	5%	45%	26%	24%	38	5%
Education	3%	13%	27%	27%	31%	275	16%
Public service in ministries or local authorities	3%	11%	38%	25%	24%	93	14%
Other public services	1%	12%	39%	30%	18%	77	13%
Associations (e.g. trade association, union)	2%	9%	37%	30%	22%	46	11%
Other sector or outside labour market	3%	3%	46%	11%	37%	35	6%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

## ANNEX 2: BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES IN THE SURVEY AMONG THE PUBLIC

**Table i. Have you heard about the Welfare Watch?**

	Yes	No	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Yes
<b>Total</b>	24%	76%	876	877	24%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	22%	78%	434	445	22%
Female	26%	74%	442	432	26%
<b>Age***</b>					
18–29 years	5%	95%	187	133	5%
30–44 years	18%	82%	262	259	18%
45–59 years	36%	64%	217	254	36%
Age 60 and older	36%	64%	209	231	36%
<b>Residency</b>					
Greater Reykjavík area	25%	75%	562	579	25%
Outside Reykjavík area	23%	77%	314	298	23%
<b>Marital status***</b>					
Single	11%	89%	157	113	11%
Cohabiting	18%	82%	199	187	18%
Married/registered cohabitation	33%	67%	383	439	33%
Divorced or widow/widowed	23%	77%	103	105	23%
<b>Children in the home***</b>					
No children in the home	28%	72%	470	468	28%
Children in the home	19%	81%	378	381	19%
<b>Education***</b>					
Primary school education	17%	83%	314	110	17%
Vocational education at secondary school level	34%	66%	152	164	34%
Academic education at secondary school level	16%	84%	148	139	16%
University education	32%	68%	220	422	32%
<b>Position on labour market***</b>					
Salaried employment	27%	73%	472	511	27%
Self-employed/employer	35%	65%	75	86	35%
Studying	5%	95%	99	68	5%
Other	24%	76%	205	188	24%
<b>Labour-market status**</b>					
Managers and experts	39%	61%	177	283	39%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	25%	75%	121	127	25%
Office and sales and services personnel	22%	78%	138	106	22%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	26%	74%	77	44	26%
<b>Income of individual***</b>					
Less than ISK 200 thousand	11%	89%	145	99	11%
ISK 201–300 thousand	24%	76%	147	125	24%
ISK 301–400 thousand	27%	73%	132	120	27%
ISK 401–600 thousand	30%	70%	166	202	30%
More than ISK 600 thousand	32%	68%	147	190	32%
<b>Household income**</b>					
Less than ISK 300 thousand	18%	82%	163	113	18%
ISK 301–500 thousand	19%	81%	193	169	19%
ISK 501–700 thousand	32%	68%	123	134	32%
ISK 701–900 thousand	29%	71%	95	113	29%
More than ISK 900 thousand	32%	68%	139	188	32%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow</b>					
Bright Future	25%	75%	90	93	25%
Progressive Party	30%	70%	87	83	30%
Independence Party	28%	72%	137	151	28%
Alliance Party	25%	75%	108	128	25%
Left-Green Alliance	27%	73%	81	93	27%
Other political party or candidate	22%	78%	88	87	22%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table ii. How familiar or unfamiliar are you with the work of the Welfare Watch?**

	Very familiar	Rather familiar	Neither familiar nor poorly	Rather poorly	Very poorly	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather familiar
<b>Total</b>	1%	9%	24%	42%	25%	208	252	9%
<b>Gender<sup>inv</sup> (-)</b>								
Male	1%	9%	24%	41%	25%	94	116	10%
Female	0%	9%	23%	42%	26%	114	136	9%
<b>Age<sup>inv</sup></b>								
18–29 years	0%	38%	14%	40%	8%	9	9	38%
30–44 years	1%	8%	20%	43%	28%	45	53	9%
45–59 years	0%	5%	30%	39%	26%	78	99	5%
Age 60 and older	1%	10%	20%	45%	25%	76	91	11%
<b>Residency<sup>inv</sup> (-)</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	1%	10%	25%	36%	29%	137	165	11%
Outside Reykjavík area	1%	7%	21%	54%	18%	71	87	7%
<b>Marital status<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Single	2%	8%	26%	36%	28%	17	22	10%
Cohabiting	2%	4%	23%	27%	44%	36	40	5%
Married/registered cohabitation	0%	9%	23%	48%	20%	123	154	9%
Divorced or widow/widowed	0%	19%	28%	35%	19%	24	29	19%
<b>Children in the home<sup>inv</sup> (-)</b>								
No children in the home	1%	9%	28%	39%	23%	133	154	10%
Children in the home	1%	9%	15%	49%	27%	69	92	10%
<b>Education<sup>inv</sup> (-)</b>								
Primary school education	0%	4%	15%	55%	26%	54	21	4%
Vocational education at secondary school level	0%	10%	20%	48%	22%	51	56	10%
Academic education at secondary school level	0%	9%	15%	41%	34%	24	26	9%
University education	2%	12%	34%	30%	22%	68	139	14%
<b>Position on labour market<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Salaried employment	1%	9%	24%	40%	26%	123	158	10%
Self-employed/employer	0%	2%	24%	44%	30%	27	28	2%
Studying	0%	0%	44%	24%	32%	5	6	0%
Other	0%	13%	21%	47%	19%	49	56	13%
<b>Labour-market status<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Managers and experts	2%	15%	27%	32%	24%	68	108	17%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	0%	0%	23%	48%	29%	31	34	0%
Office and sales and services personnel	0%	4%	21%	35%	40%	30	27	4%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	0%	0%	13%	69%	17%	20	13	0%
<b>Income of individual<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	0%	8%	17%	51%	24%	16	14	8%
ISK 201–300 thousand	0%	8%	23%	55%	14%	36	32	8%
ISK 301–400 thousand	2%	6%	17%	55%	20%	35	38	8%
ISK 401–600 thousand	0%	11%	31%	33%	25%	49	71	11%
More than ISK 600 thousand	2%	11%	25%	33%	28%	46	61	13%
<b>Household income<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	0%	11%	15%	50%	24%	30	25	11%
ISK 301–500 thousand	0%	11%	27%	42%	20%	37	42	11%
ISK 501–700 thousand	1%	2%	31%	54%	12%	40	42	3%
ISK 701–900 thousand	2%	5%	21%	51%	21%	27	39	7%
More than ISK 900 thousand	1%	17%	25%	29%	28%	43	63	18%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Bright Future	0%	12%	35%	27%	26%	23	27	12%
Progressive Party	0%	23%	17%	20%	40%	26	32	23%
Independence Party	0%	5%	26%	38%	31%	37	46	5%
Alliance Party	4%	9%	41%	33%	13%	26	44	13%
Left-Green Alliance	2%	10%	12%	62%	14%	22	32	11%
Other political party or candidate	0%	3%	24%	44%	29%	19	21	3%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

<sup>inv</sup> means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

The categories *Very familiar* and *Rather familiar* were merged during statistical processing and significance indicated in parentheses.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table iii. Do you think that the Welfare Watch was of great or little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the economic collapse?**

	Very important	Rather important	Neither important nor unimportant	Rather unimportant	Very unimportant or not at all important	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather important
<b>Total</b>	10%	36%	19%	18%	16%	136	161	46%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	7%	32%	21%	16%	23%	58	67	39%
Female	12%	39%	18%	20%	11%	78	94	51%
<b>Age<sup>inv</sup></b>								
18–29 years	38%	47%	15%	0%	0%	7	6	85%
30–44 years	4%	19%	28%	13%	36%	29	35	23%
45–59 years	5%	31%	23%	26%	16%	52	67	35%
Age 60 and older	16%	50%	11%	16%	7%	48	53	66%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	15%	38%	17%	17%	14%	88	101	52%
Outside Reykjavík area	2%	32%	24%	22%	20%	48	60	34%
<b>Marital status<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Single	15%	32%	23%	12%	17%	11	16	48%
Cohabiting	6%	21%	32%	10%	32%	22	24	26%
Married/registered cohabitation	9%	38%	18%	25%	10%	81	98	48%
Divorced or widow/widowed	13%	55%	14%	8%	9%	16	20	68%
<b>Children in the home<sup>**</sup></b>								
No children in the home	12%	42%	21%	18%	7%	87	97	54%
Children in the home	5%	26%	18%	19%	32%	47	62	31%
<b>Education<sup>inv (-)</sup></b>								
Primary school education	13%	31%	14%	21%	21%	39	15	45%
Vocational education at secondary school level	6%	29%	26%	15%	23%	36	39	35%
Academic education at secondary school level	13%	37%	26%	24%	0%	11	11	50%
University education	9%	45%	20%	18%	8%	44	90	54%
<b>Position on labour market<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Salaried employment	12%	33%	24%	14%	17%	79	105	45%
Self-employed/employer	3%	28%	12%	40%	17%	16	14	31%
Studying	0%	52%	23%	0%	25%	5	5	52%
Other	8%	46%	13%	22%	11%	33	35	54%
<b>Labour-market status<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Managers and experts	10%	37%	18%	18%	17%	44	70	47%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	0%	24%	33%	23%	20%	22	25	24%
Office and sales and services personnel	38%	29%	24%	3%	6%	17	14	67%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	0%	28%	8%	28%	36%	12	8	28%
<b>Income of individual<sup>inv (-)</sup></b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	15%	35%	17%	23%	10%	12	9	50%
ISK 201–300 thousand	14%	41%	19%	15%	11%	26	23	55%
ISK 301–400 thousand	13%	48%	7%	16%	16%	25	27	61%
ISK 401–600 thousand	6%	36%	27%	25%	6%	33	49	43%
More than ISK 600 thousand	7%	25%	27%	17%	24%	29	38	32%
<b>Household income<sup>inv (-)</sup></b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	12%	44%	11%	14%	19%	22	17	56%
ISK 301–500 thousand	14%	39%	15%	26%	6%	27	31	53%
ISK 501–700 thousand	0%	41%	29%	17%	13%	27	28	41%
ISK 701–900 thousand	3%	31%	29%	17%	20%	19	25	34%
More than ISK 900 thousand	18%	32%	18%	20%	12%	30	43	50%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow<sup>inv</sup></b>								
Bright Future	7%	36%	36%	11%	10%	18	19	43%
Progressive Party	7%	30%	13%	29%	21%	18	22	37%
Independence Party	2%	27%	18%	27%	26%	23	27	29%
Alliance Party	12%	45%	15%	27%	3%	17	28	56%
Left-Green Alliance	11%	63%	11%	11%	4%	13	20	74%
Other political party or candidate	0%	28%	28%	14%	30%	9	12	28%

There is a significant difference in the group: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

<sup>inv</sup> means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

The categories *Very important* and *Rather important* on the one hand and the categories *Very unimportant* and *Not at all important* on the other, were merged in the statistical processing and their significance indicated in parentheses.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table iv. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on trying to prevent poverty?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	7%	12%	17%	29%	35%	890	902	19%
<b>Gender*</b>								
Male	10%	13%	17%	26%	35%	445	464	22%
Female	5%	10%	18%	32%	35%	445	438	15%
<b>Age***</b>								
18–29 years	3%	19%	22%	32%	24%	171	123	22%
30–44 years	8%	10%	12%	30%	40%	253	253	18%
45–59 years	8%	12%	22%	22%	36%	231	267	20%
Age 60 and older	9%	7%	15%	33%	37%	235	259	16%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	8%	11%	17%	29%	35%	575	597	19%
Outside Reykjavík area	5%	13%	18%	29%	34%	314	305	18%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	7%	15%	13%	24%	41%	148	110	21%
Cohabiting	10%	10%	19%	31%	29%	187	180	20%
Married/registered cohabitation	7%	11%	18%	29%	36%	412	468	17%
Divorced or widow/widowed	7%	13%	14%	31%	35%	107	109	20%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	7%	12%	17%	29%	33%	481	490	20%
Children in the home	8%	10%	17%	28%	37%	380	383	18%
<b>Education*</b>								
Primary school education	9%	10%	18%	31%	32%	309	109	19%
Vocational education at secondary school level	7%	6%	15%	27%	44%	162	177	13%
Academic education at secondary school level	4%	10%	18%	35%	33%	149	141	14%
University education	8%	17%	18%	24%	32%	221	427	25%
<b>Position on labour market**</b>								
Salaried employment	7%	12%	16%	26%	39%	472	520	19%
Self-employed/employer	7%	11%	25%	36%	22%	82	92	18%
Studying	3%	21%	21%	33%	21%	86	62	25%
Other	10%	7%	16%	29%	38%	223	202	16%
<b>Labour-market status***</b>								
Managers and experts	9%	20%	22%	24%	26%	176	283	29%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	4%	9%	14%	27%	45%	125	134	14%
Office and sales and services personnel	3%	10%	16%	34%	36%	137	110	13%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	5%	5%	22%	21%	47%	81	47	10%
<b>Income of individual***</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	4%	17%	22%	32%	24%	140	93	21%
ISK 201–300 thousand	8%	7%	11%	36%	38%	145	128	15%
ISK 301–400 thousand	7%	6%	22%	20%	45%	142	134	14%
ISK 401–600 thousand	4%	11%	17%	31%	38%	165	207	14%
More than ISK 600 thousand	14%	15%	15%	28%	29%	149	189	28%
<b>Household income**</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	6%	13%	17%	32%	33%	153	106	18%
ISK 301–500 thousand	6%	5%	17%	29%	44%	203	182	11%
ISK 501–700 thousand	5%	11%	22%	24%	37%	123	138	16%
ISK 701–900 thousand	13%	11%	12%	39%	25%	100	123	24%
More than ISK 900 thousand	10%	14%	18%	27%	31%	137	183	24%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	6%	12%	15%	22%	46%	89	96	18%
Progressive Party	5%	13%	28%	36%	18%	91	88	18%
Independence Party	5%	9%	29%	34%	22%	143	155	14%
Alliance Party	15%	8%	14%	26%	38%	103	131	22%
Left-Green Alliance	5%	12%	6%	28%	49%	89	103	17%
Other political party or candidate	3%	10%	12%	28%	47%	94	89	13%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table v. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on supporting low-income families with children?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	7%	14%	17%	30%	32%	884	893	21%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	7%	17%	18%	29%	28%	446	461	24%
Female	6%	12%	15%	31%	35%	438	432	18%
<b>Age**</b>								
18–29 years	5%	21%	19%	32%	22%	172	123	26%
30–44 years	8%	12%	13%	28%	39%	254	251	19%
45–59 years	8%	16%	18%	26%	32%	231	267	24%
Age 60 and older	6%	11%	17%	35%	30%	227	252	17%
<b>Residency*</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	9%	13%	15%	31%	33%	569	589	22%
Outside Reykjavík area	4%	16%	20%	30%	30%	315	304	20%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	5%	19%	16%	24%	36%	146	107	23%
Cohabiting	12%	12%	14%	31%	32%	183	178	24%
Married/registered cohabitation	6%	13%	18%	33%	30%	414	465	19%
Divorced or widow/widowed	9%	11%	15%	35%	30%	106	108	20%
<b>Children in the home*</b>								
No children in the home	7%	14%	18%	33%	27%	474	482	22%
Children in the home	6%	14%	16%	27%	37%	382	382	20%
<b>Education*</b>								
Primary school education	7%	15%	17%	32%	29%	310	109	22%
Vocational education at secondary school level	7%	6%	17%	30%	41%	161	175	12%
Academic education at secondary school level	5%	13%	17%	33%	31%	147	139	19%
University education	8%	20%	15%	29%	28%	218	422	28%
<b>Position on labour market**</b>								
Salaried employment	7%	15%	16%	29%	34%	473	517	22%
Self-employed/employer	5%	17%	19%	32%	27%	82	92	22%
Studying	2%	27%	19%	31%	21%	84	61	28%
Other	10%	7%	17%	34%	33%	218	197	17%
<b>Labour-market status**</b>								
Managers and experts	7%	23%	17%	30%	23%	178	282	30%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	4%	9%	16%	31%	39%	124	133	14%
Office and sales and services personnel	4%	16%	14%	24%	41%	138	109	20%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	5%	7%	23%	32%	33%	81	47	12%
<b>Income of individual</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	8%	15%	16%	35%	25%	136	90	24%
ISK 201–300 thousand	8%	8%	16%	34%	35%	144	124	15%
ISK 301–400 thousand	8%	10%	19%	28%	35%	142	133	18%
ISK 401–600 thousand	4%	12%	13%	35%	37%	165	207	15%
More than ISK 600 thousand	11%	17%	17%	29%	25%	148	188	28%
<b>Household income*</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	7%	13%	18%	32%	30%	149	102	20%
ISK 301–500 thousand	5%	7%	15%	35%	38%	198	178	12%
ISK 501–700 thousand	5%	16%	17%	29%	33%	126	137	21%
ISK 701–900 thousand	9%	15%	9%	38%	29%	103	124	24%
More than ISK 900 thousand	11%	14%	23%	27%	25%	137	183	25%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	7%	16%	9%	34%	34%	88	94	23%
Progressive Party	5%	17%	23%	35%	19%	94	89	23%
Independence Party	5%	13%	27%	37%	19%	139	151	18%
Alliance Party	13%	17%	4%	34%	32%	106	132	30%
Left-Green Alliance	6%	11%	10%	22%	50%	88	101	18%
Other political party or candidate	5%	4%	23%	24%	45%	93	88	9%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%



**Table vi. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on supporting low-income people with housing problems?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	6%	13%	13%	30%	37%	892	902	20%
<b>Gender*</b>								
Male	8%	15%	15%	30%	33%	448	465	23%
Female	5%	11%	12%	30%	42%	444	437	16%
<b>Age</b>								
18–29 years	6%	20%	14%	32%	29%	177	126	25%
30–44 years	6%	13%	11%	31%	39%	254	251	19%
45–59 years	7%	12%	16%	29%	35%	230	266	19%
Age 60 and older	6%	10%	12%	29%	44%	231	259	16%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	8%	12%	12%	29%	39%	575	595	20%
Outside Reykjavík area	4%	14%	15%	32%	35%	317	307	19%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	4%	16%	14%	22%	43%	147	108	21%
Cohabiting	10%	14%	9%	31%	36%	189	181	24%
Married/registered cohabitation	6%	11%	15%	31%	37%	412	467	17%
Divorced or widow/widowed	5%	15%	10%	35%	34%	108	111	21%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	7%	13%	13%	30%	37%	483	492	21%
Children in the home	5%	13%	14%	30%	39%	381	381	18%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	8%	13%	12%	31%	36%	310	109	20%
Vocational education at secondary school level	6%	11%	10%	28%	45%	163	178	17%
Academic education at secondary school level	5%	12%	15%	31%	37%	152	143	17%
University education	6%	17%	15%	30%	32%	219	424	23%
<b>Position on labour market**</b>								
Salaried employment	6%	15%	12%	29%	37%	476	518	22%
Self-employed/employer	3%	9%	20%	34%	35%	82	93	12%
Studying	3%	19%	22%	23%	34%	87	63	22%
Other	9%	8%	11%	32%	40%	220	202	17%
<b>Labour-market status**</b>								
Managers and experts	6%	23%	14%	29%	28%	177	281	29%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	5%	8%	16%	29%	42%	125	134	13%
Office and sales and services personnel	3%	17%	7%	29%	43%	140	110	21%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	5%	4%	16%	35%	40%	81	47	9%
<b>Income of individual*</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	9%	15%	10%	35%	32%	142	94	24%
ISK 201–300 thousand	8%	9%	12%	26%	45%	149	131	17%
ISK 301–400 thousand	6%	8%	15%	35%	36%	141	133	15%
ISK 401–600 thousand	2%	11%	12%	33%	42%	167	207	13%
More than ISK 600 thousand	11%	17%	14%	27%	31%	149	189	28%
<b>Household income**</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	6%	14%	14%	32%	34%	156	109	20%
ISK 301–500 thousand	4%	5%	11%	35%	45%	199	179	9%
ISK 501–700 thousand	6%	14%	15%	27%	39%	127	139	19%
ISK 701–900 thousand	7%	15%	6%	32%	40%	104	124	22%
More than ISK 900 thousand	10%	14%	17%	31%	27%	138	184	25%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	5%	17%	11%	30%	37%	89	95	22%
Progressive Party	5%	18%	15%	31%	31%	94	89	23%
Independence Party	7%	11%	20%	42%	21%	143	156	17%
Alliance Party	9%	13%	11%	34%	32%	108	133	22%
Left-Green Alliance	4%	11%	10%	18%	57%	87	101	14%
Other political party or candidate	6%	2%	11%	28%	54%	94	89	7%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table vii. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on reducing the medical expenses of patients struggling with severe, chronic diseases?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	7%	9%	12%	26%	45%	872	873	16%
<b>Gender**</b>								
Male	8%	11%	15%	24%	42%	430	443	19%
Female	6%	8%	9%	28%	49%	442	430	14%
<b>Age</b>								
18–29 years	7%	11%	15%	30%	37%	170	120	17%
30–44 years	8%	9%	9%	25%	49%	242	236	17%
45–59 years	6%	10%	15%	25%	44%	229	262	17%
Age 60 and older	6%	8%	11%	25%	49%	231	255	15%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	8%	9%	13%	27%	44%	565	572	17%
Outside Reykjavík area	6%	10%	11%	25%	48%	308	301	16%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	6%	9%	10%	28%	47%	141	103	14%
Cohabiting	9%	11%	15%	25%	40%	187	175	21%
Married/registered cohabitation	7%	8%	13%	24%	47%	406	455	16%
Divorced or widow/widowed	5%	11%	9%	29%	46%	105	107	16%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	7%	9%	13%	25%	46%	483	483	16%
Children in the home	7%	10%	12%	26%	46%	364	363	16%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	7%	12%	13%	28%	40%	310	109	19%
Vocational education at secondary school level	8%	3%	12%	26%	50%	162	176	12%
Academic education at secondary school level	6%	6%	10%	28%	50%	148	140	12%
University education	7%	11%	14%	24%	44%	206	402	18%
<b>Position on labour market</b>								
Salaried employment	7%	10%	13%	23%	48%	467	504	16%
Self-employed/employer	5%	10%	17%	34%	33%	80	89	16%
Studying	5%	13%	16%	26%	41%	85	58	18%
Other	9%	7%	9%	27%	48%	215	198	16%
<b>Labour-market status</b>								
Managers and experts	6%	11%	17%	24%	42%	167	268	18%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	5%	8%	13%	21%	53%	122	130	13%
Office and sales and services personnel	6%	11%	10%	29%	44%	140	109	17%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	3%	7%	17%	29%	45%	82	46	9%
<b>Income of individual*</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	9%	9%	14%	29%	39%	140	90	18%
ISK 201–300 thousand	5%	9%	9%	29%	48%	148	128	14%
ISK 301–400 thousand	6%	9%	8%	23%	55%	142	134	14%
ISK 401–600 thousand	3%	5%	15%	27%	49%	159	199	8%
More than ISK 600 thousand	10%	15%	14%	26%	35%	144	180	25%
<b>Household income**</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	4%	9%	13%	30%	44%	152	102	13%
ISK 301–500 thousand	3%	6%	9%	32%	50%	195	176	9%
ISK 501–700 thousand	4%	11%	16%	20%	49%	127	139	15%
ISK 701–900 thousand	10%	9%	7%	21%	53%	99	120	19%
More than ISK 900 thousand	9%	12%	17%	28%	34%	133	175	22%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow**</b>								
Bright Future	6%	5%	9%	34%	46%	84	88	11%
Progressive Party	2%	17%	20%	26%	36%	93	88	18%
Independence Party	6%	7%	19%	32%	36%	141	152	13%
Alliance Party	7%	11%	10%	28%	44%	103	126	18%
Left-Green Alliance	3%	9%	8%	28%	52%	86	98	12%
Other political party or candidate	5%	3%	7%	30%	56%	93	87	8%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table viii. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring that all children are given lunch in Icelandic primary schools?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	8%	15%	30%	22%	25%	754	742	23%
<b>Gender*</b>								
Male	8%	15%	35%	21%	21%	376	375	23%
Female	7%	15%	25%	23%	30%	377	367	22%
<b>Age**</b>								
18–29 years	11%	21%	27%	22%	19%	140	98	32%
30–44 years	8%	9%	25%	25%	32%	211	201	17%
45–59 years	7%	13%	36%	22%	23%	200	230	20%
Age 60 and older	5%	20%	30%	20%	25%	202	213	25%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	7%	15%	29%	24%	25%	474	478	22%
Outside Reykjavík area	8%	15%	30%	20%	27%	280	264	23%
<b>Marital status*</b>								
Single	5%	15%	24%	31%	25%	118	85	20%
Cohabiting	11%	10%	35%	20%	23%	155	143	22%
Married/registered cohabitation	6%	14%	31%	21%	27%	360	392	21%
Divorced or widow/widowed	6%	27%	26%	16%	25%	89	92	33%
<b>Children in the home**</b>								
No children in the home	8%	18%	31%	23%	21%	407	395	25%
Children in the home	8%	11%	28%	21%	31%	320	319	19%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	9%	14%	33%	22%	22%	289	102	23%
Vocational education at secondary school level	9%	12%	28%	26%	25%	136	148	21%
Academic education at secondary school level	5%	17%	32%	21%	26%	111	106	21%
University education	7%	17%	28%	21%	28%	177	345	24%
<b>Position on labour market**</b>								
Salaried employment	6%	11%	30%	25%	28%	401	426	17%
Self-employed/employer	11%	16%	39%	17%	18%	65	78	26%
Studying	7%	30%	33%	14%	16%	64	45	37%
Other	10%	18%	28%	20%	24%	200	169	28%
<b>Labour-market status</b>								
Managers and experts	7%	14%	27%	26%	26%	154	240	20%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	3%	10%	33%	25%	29%	107	111	13%
Office and sales and services personnel	6%	14%	36%	16%	28%	107	84	20%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	1%	11%	29%	31%	28%	71	40	12%
<b>Income of individual***</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	15%	22%	28%	23%	12%	115	72	37%
ISK 201–300 thousand	7%	16%	20%	25%	31%	125	104	23%
ISK 301–400 thousand	4%	15%	35%	22%	24%	127	119	19%
ISK 401–600 thousand	5%	12%	30%	18%	36%	130	160	16%
More than ISK 600 thousand	10%	9%	35%	23%	24%	129	163	18%
<b>Household income</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	12%	22%	21%	26%	19%	122	77	34%
ISK 301–500 thousand	6%	9%	33%	22%	30%	175	156	15%
ISK 501–700 thousand	4%	13%	31%	23%	28%	107	115	18%
ISK 701–900 thousand	8%	14%	32%	18%	28%	85	106	22%
More than ISK 900 thousand	8%	14%	30%	25%	23%	114	149	22%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	4%	6%	39%	33%	17%	73	73	10%
Progressive Party	10%	19%	32%	23%	17%	82	75	29%
Independence Party	7%	13%	37%	28%	16%	124	130	20%
Alliance Party	5%	20%	29%	24%	22%	91	110	25%
Left-Green Alliance	3%	14%	15%	26%	42%	73	83	18%
Other political party or candidate	8%	13%	36%	11%	32%	77	71	21%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table ix. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring mental health services for children?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	8%	8%	15%	28%	40%	800	795	16%
<b>Gender**</b>								
Male	8%	10%	19%	27%	35%	395	403	19%
Female	7%	6%	12%	29%	45%	405	392	13%
<b>Age***</b>								
18–29 years	9%	17%	15%	26%	34%	151	103	26%
30–44 years	9%	5%	11%	32%	43%	224	218	14%
45–59 years	7%	5%	23%	25%	40%	214	247	12%
Age 60 and older	6%	9%	13%	30%	42%	212	227	15%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	8%	8%	15%	27%	42%	507	517	16%
Outside Reykjavík area	7%	9%	16%	31%	37%	293	278	16%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	6%	13%	10%	28%	42%	126	92	19%
Cohabiting	10%	7%	17%	27%	39%	168	161	18%
Married/registered cohabitation	7%	7%	19%	28%	40%	379	415	13%
Divorced or widow/widowed	7%	10%	8%	33%	42%	96	98	16%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	7%	10%	15%	29%	39%	431	429	17%
Children in the home	8%	6%	16%	27%	43%	345	341	14%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	9%	10%	15%	30%	36%	300	106	19%
Vocational education at secondary school level	8%	6%	14%	30%	43%	142	154	14%
Academic education at secondary school level	5%	7%	20%	27%	42%	124	118	12%
University education	8%	8%	15%	27%	42%	193	376	16%
<b>Position on labour market***</b>								
Salaried employment	7%	6%	18%	27%	42%	424	460	13%
Self-employed/employer	7%	8%	16%	33%	35%	75	82	15%
Studying	10%	24%	13%	15%	37%	72	51	34%
Other	9%	7%	12%	34%	38%	208	181	16%
<b>Labour-market status</b>								
Managers and experts	7%	7%	18%	29%	39%	159	250	14%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	6%	4%	14%	34%	43%	111	118	9%
Office and sales and services personnel	6%	11%	18%	24%	41%	122	97	17%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	1%	2%	23%	28%	45%	75	44	3%
<b>Income of individual**</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	12%	10%	18%	34%	26%	126	80	22%
ISK 201–300 thousand	6%	14%	9%	25%	46%	138	117	20%
ISK 301–400 thousand	6%	5%	14%	29%	47%	130	125	11%
ISK 401–600 thousand	4%	6%	15%	32%	43%	139	173	10%
More than ISK 600 thousand	9%	8%	19%	28%	36%	131	167	17%
<b>Household income**</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	7%	14%	15%	33%	30%	134	89	22%
ISK 301–500 thousand	4%	4%	11%	33%	48%	183	162	7%
ISK 501–700 thousand	5%	10%	19%	26%	39%	117	126	15%
ISK 701–900 thousand	9%	6%	9%	31%	44%	92	112	15%
More than ISK 900 thousand	9%	9%	21%	26%	35%	119	157	18%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow**</b>								
Bright Future	6%	2%	13%	33%	46%	81	84	9%
Progressive Party	4%	12%	24%	34%	27%	86	79	15%
Independence Party	6%	8%	28%	27%	31%	124	134	14%
Alliance Party	6%	8%	11%	34%	41%	84	109	14%
Left-Green Alliance	5%	6%	7%	31%	51%	78	90	11%
Other political party or candidate	5%	1%	14%	32%	47%	85	79	6%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table x. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on formulating a comprehensive policy for housing issues?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	5%	12%	17%	29%	37%	867	874	17%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	7%	13%	19%	26%	36%	442	457	19%
Female	4%	11%	15%	31%	39%	425	417	15%
<b>Age</b>								
18–29 years	6%	15%	18%	29%	31%	162	114	21%
30–44 years	5%	11%	17%	28%	38%	250	248	16%
45–59 years	5%	11%	18%	27%	39%	227	261	16%
Age 60 and older	5%	11%	14%	30%	39%	229	251	16%
<b>Residency*</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	7%	11%	16%	29%	38%	567	580	18%
Outside Reykjavík area	2%	14%	19%	28%	37%	299	294	16%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	5%	9%	17%	32%	37%	135	101	14%
Cohabiting	9%	10%	16%	26%	39%	186	177	19%
Married/registered cohabitation	4%	13%	19%	28%	36%	411	460	17%
Divorced or widow/widowed	7%	13%	11%	31%	38%	102	104	20%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	7%	12%	17%	28%	36%	478	478	18%
Children in the home	4%	12%	16%	28%	39%	364	370	16%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	5%	13%	15%	31%	37%	309	109	18%
Vocational education at secondary school level	7%	8%	16%	28%	41%	156	170	15%
Academic education at secondary school level	5%	13%	19%	27%	36%	147	138	18%
University education	5%	13%	19%	27%	36%	214	415	18%
<b>Position on labour market**</b>								
Salaried employment	5%	12%	19%	27%	37%	465	503	17%
Self-employed/employer	3%	10%	14%	33%	40%	83	95	13%
Studying	1%	24%	12%	23%	40%	84	61	25%
Other	9%	8%	14%	30%	38%	215	194	17%
<b>Labour-market status</b>								
Managers and experts	4%	16%	18%	29%	33%	174	278	20%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	3%	8%	22%	23%	43%	121	130	12%
Office and sales and services personnel	3%	14%	14%	33%	36%	133	103	17%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	5%	3%	23%	31%	38%	83	48	8%
<b>Income of individual**</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	8%	13%	13%	34%	32%	136	90	21%
ISK 201–300 thousand	6%	9%	10%	27%	47%	145	125	16%
ISK 301–400 thousand	5%	7%	18%	38%	32%	134	127	12%
ISK 401–600 thousand	3%	8%	18%	31%	39%	161	200	11%
More than ISK 600 thousand	7%	17%	21%	20%	35%	148	189	24%
<b>Household income***</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	6%	10%	14%	31%	39%	148	102	16%
ISK 301–500 thousand	6%	6%	12%	31%	45%	192	174	12%
ISK 501–700 thousand	5%	10%	20%	41%	24%	121	133	15%
ISK 701–900 thousand	4%	13%	13%	24%	46%	101	120	17%
More than ISK 900 thousand	6%	16%	25%	23%	29%	137	183	23%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	5%	6%	22%	40%	28%	88	94	10%
Progressive Party	8%	17%	24%	18%	34%	93	89	24%
Independence Party	7%	11%	25%	27%	30%	144	156	18%
Alliance Party	4%	9%	15%	32%	39%	105	130	13%
Left-Green Alliance	1%	6%	10%	34%	49%	85	97	8%
Other political party or candidate	3%	3%	12%	38%	45%	86	82	6%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xi. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on comprehensively analysing the financial situation of households?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	6%	17%	17%	28%	32%	867	878	23%
<b>Gender***</b>								
Male	7%	19%	19%	28%	26%	444	456	26%
Female	4%	15%	15%	27%	39%	423	422	19%
<b>Age***</b>								
18–29 years	5%	26%	19%	31%	19%	161	115	31%
30–44 years	8%	14%	16%	29%	33%	251	250	22%
45–59 years	5%	18%	20%	23%	34%	231	265	23%
Age 60 and older	4%	12%	14%	30%	40%	225	248	16%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	7%	16%	15%	28%	34%	566	583	23%
Outside Reykjavík area	4%	18%	21%	27%	30%	302	295	22%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	7%	17%	18%	26%	33%	134	101	23%
Cohabiting	5%	19%	17%	30%	28%	188	180	25%
Married/registered cohabitation	5%	16%	20%	28%	31%	414	462	21%
Divorced or widow/widowed	8%	13%	7%	25%	47%	103	106	22%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	6%	16%	16%	29%	33%	475	479	22%
Children in the home	5%	19%	19%	26%	31%	368	374	24%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	5%	16%	15%	31%	33%	306	108	21%
Vocational education at secondary school level	7%	10%	20%	28%	34%	159	173	17%
Academic education at secondary school level	4%	19%	22%	29%	26%	144	136	23%
University education	7%	22%	16%	23%	32%	216	419	29%
<b>Position on labour market</b>								
Salaried employment	6%	19%	17%	26%	32%	473	511	25%
Self-employed/employer	4%	9%	21%	32%	33%	83	94	14%
Studying	5%	26%	17%	29%	22%	77	58	32%
Other	6%	12%	15%	29%	38%	213	194	18%
<b>Labour-market status*</b>								
Managers and experts	7%	23%	18%	27%	26%	177	282	30%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	4%	13%	23%	27%	33%	120	128	17%
Office and sales and services personnel	5%	16%	11%	34%	33%	139	109	21%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	2%	10%	22%	22%	45%	83	48	12%
<b>Income of individual***</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	6%	19%	15%	30%	30%	130	87	25%
ISK 201–300 thousand	9%	10%	8%	36%	38%	143	124	19%
ISK 301–400 thousand	2%	15%	19%	24%	39%	139	131	18%
ISK 401–600 thousand	3%	16%	18%	34%	29%	164	203	19%
More than ISK 600 thousand	10%	21%	22%	21%	26%	149	191	31%
<b>Household income*</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	7%	15%	10%	31%	37%	139	97	22%
ISK 301–500 thousand	3%	11%	14%	32%	40%	195	175	14%
ISK 501–700 thousand	7%	15%	21%	27%	30%	123	135	21%
ISK 701–900 thousand	7%	19%	18%	24%	33%	104	124	26%
More than ISK 900 thousand	8%	20%	24%	25%	23%	139	185	28%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	5%	18%	14%	31%	32%	87	93	23%
Progressive Party	7%	18%	21%	29%	26%	93	87	25%
Independence Party	5%	18%	26%	21%	30%	146	158	23%
Alliance Party	10%	18%	15%	31%	25%	104	130	29%
Left-Green Alliance	3%	11%	8%	30%	49%	85	97	14%
Other political party or candidate	6%	5%	12%	40%	37%	89	86	10%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xii. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on ensuring that all students at the age of secondary school level are guaranteed a place in school?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	8%	17%	29%	22%	23%	801	815	25%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	9%	18%	31%	21%	21%	406	426	27%
Female	8%	16%	28%	22%	26%	395	389	24%
<b>Age</b>								
18–29 years	8%	24%	33%	17%	18%	153	110	32%
30–44 years	10%	12%	28%	22%	28%	218	218	21%
45–59 years	8%	19%	28%	24%	21%	210	244	27%
Age 60 and older	7%	16%	30%	22%	25%	221	243	23%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	9%	19%	27%	23%	23%	518	538	28%
Outside Reykjavík area	7%	14%	35%	19%	25%	283	277	21%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	7%	20%	22%	21%	31%	129	94	27%
Cohabiting	12%	14%	33%	22%	20%	162	158	26%
Married/registered cohabitation	7%	17%	33%	22%	21%	383	432	24%
Divorced or widow/widowed	8%	20%	23%	21%	28%	95	100	28%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	8%	19%	28%	21%	24%	455	456	27%
Children in the home	8%	14%	32%	22%	24%	322	334	22%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	7%	15%	35%	21%	22%	285	101	22%
Vocational education at secondary school level	8%	15%	25%	29%	23%	140	153	22%
Academic education at secondary school level	8%	20%	27%	21%	24%	134	127	28%
University education	8%	22%	27%	18%	24%	201	393	31%
<b>Position on labour market*</b>								
Salaried employment	8%	16%	29%	24%	23%	429	472	24%
Self-employed/employer	8%	14%	30%	28%	20%	75	88	22%
Studying	6%	32%	35%	9%	18%	72	51	38%
Other	9%	16%	29%	20%	26%	200	181	25%
<b>Labour-market status</b>								
Managers and experts	8%	19%	32%	19%	22%	164	264	26%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	6%	15%	30%	24%	24%	113	122	22%
Office and sales and services personnel	10%	15%	31%	26%	19%	118	98	25%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	3%	12%	23%	31%	31%	79	45	14%
<b>Income of individual</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	11%	25%	28%	21%	15%	122	78	35%
ISK 201–300 thousand	6%	19%	27%	21%	27%	138	118	25%
ISK 301–400 thousand	8%	15%	26%	25%	27%	134	127	23%
ISK 401–600 thousand	7%	18%	29%	25%	22%	138	180	24%
More than ISK 600 thousand	10%	16%	32%	23%	18%	138	178	27%
<b>Household income</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	5%	26%	19%	22%	27%	138	92	32%
ISK 301–500 thousand	7%	13%	30%	24%	26%	179	162	20%
ISK 501–700 thousand	8%	18%	33%	23%	19%	118	129	26%
ISK 701–900 thousand	8%	21%	27%	23%	20%	89	112	29%
More than ISK 900 thousand	10%	16%	33%	23%	17%	128	170	27%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow***</b>								
Bright Future	5%	15%	23%	34%	22%	81	84	20%
Progressive Party	6%	22%	39%	20%	13%	83	81	28%
Independence Party	5%	21%	42%	20%	12%	129	141	26%
Alliance Party	11%	20%	25%	20%	24%	94	121	31%
Left-Green Alliance	8%	11%	18%	16%	48%	82	93	19%
Other political party or candidate	6%	13%	25%	26%	30%	83	80	19%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$   
inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xiii. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on offering summer jobs for young people?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	6%	13%	26%	26%	28%	797	808	19%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	6%	12%	30%	25%	27%	397	413	18%
Female	7%	13%	22%	28%	30%	400	395	20%
<b>Age***</b>								
18–29 years	7%	23%	20%	33%	17%	153	110	31%
30–44 years	9%	9%	23%	30%	29%	217	218	17%
45–59 years	3%	11%	33%	21%	32%	213	246	14%
Age 60 and older	6%	11%	27%	23%	33%	213	234	17%
<b>Residency*</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	7%	12%	22%	27%	30%	518	534	20%
Outside Reykjavík area	4%	13%	33%	24%	25%	279	274	18%
<b>Marital status*</b>								
Single	4%	15%	18%	31%	31%	133	96	19%
Cohabiting	12%	16%	23%	27%	23%	162	157	28%
Married/registered cohabitation	6%	10%	29%	26%	28%	381	429	16%
Divorced or widow/widowed	5%	13%	28%	20%	35%	91	96	17%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	8%	13%	25%	23%	30%	448	444	21%
Children in the home	5%	12%	26%	31%	27%	325	338	16%
<b>Education*</b>								
Primary school education	9%	12%	27%	27%	25%	278	98	22%
Vocational education at secondary school level	6%	4%	27%	26%	37%	147	161	10%
Academic education at secondary school level	4%	18%	22%	28%	28%	131	124	22%
University education	4%	16%	27%	26%	27%	197	382	20%
<b>Position on labour market***</b>								
Salaried employment	6%	11%	26%	29%	28%	421	460	17%
Self-employed/employer	3%	7%	35%	24%	31%	75	88	10%
Studying	2%	27%	22%	31%	19%	78	55	28%
Other	12%	12%	24%	21%	31%	200	183	23%
<b>Labour-market status*</b>								
Managers and experts	5%	11%	31%	25%	28%	161	258	15%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	2%	8%	28%	27%	35%	108	115	10%
Office and sales and services personnel	8%	16%	17%	34%	25%	119	98	24%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	1%	6%	33%	31%	28%	75	43	8%
<b>Income of individual*</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	10%	15%	26%	25%	24%	132	89	25%
ISK 201–300 thousand	9%	16%	20%	32%	23%	139	120	25%
ISK 301–400 thousand	4%	12%	25%	28%	31%	128	124	16%
ISK 401–600 thousand	2%	8%	30%	29%	31%	140	181	10%
More than ISK 600 thousand	8%	8%	30%	26%	28%	132	168	15%
<b>Household income</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	6%	14%	20%	32%	28%	146	100	20%
ISK 301–500 thousand	4%	10%	27%	26%	32%	176	161	15%
ISK 501–700 thousand	9%	11%	30%	26%	23%	118	130	20%
ISK 701–900 thousand	6%	10%	24%	29%	31%	86	108	16%
More than ISK 900 thousand	5%	11%	29%	30%	25%	127	167	16%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow**</b>								
Bright Future	3%	15%	21%	34%	27%	84	88	18%
Progressive Party	7%	15%	35%	23%	20%	84	80	22%
Independence Party	6%	8%	37%	22%	26%	128	142	14%
Alliance Party	6%	17%	30%	25%	22%	88	112	23%
Left-Green Alliance	5%	8%	17%	24%	47%	83	94	13%
Other political party or candidate	9%	3%	27%	26%	35%	79	76	13%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%



**Table xiv. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on strengthening vocational rehabilitation for people seeking employment?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	9%	20%	25%	25%	21%	775	792	28%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	8%	23%	24%	27%	19%	385	408	31%
Female	9%	17%	26%	24%	24%	389	384	26%
<b>Age***</b>								
18–29 years	8%	24%	31%	18%	18%	138	99	32%
30–44 years	12%	14%	24%	24%	26%	220	222	26%
45–59 years	5%	24%	30%	25%	17%	202	237	29%
Age 60 and older	9%	19%	16%	32%	24%	215	234	28%
<b>Residency</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	10%	19%	23%	28%	20%	495	517	29%
Outside Reykjavík area	6%	21%	27%	21%	24%	280	275	27%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	6%	24%	19%	27%	24%	119	90	30%
Cohabiting	11%	18%	26%	25%	21%	161	157	29%
Married/registered cohabitation	9%	20%	27%	26%	18%	374	420	29%
Divorced or widow/widowed	8%	20%	21%	22%	29%	90	95	29%
<b>Children in the home</b>								
No children in the home	9%	21%	23%	26%	21%	440	443	30%
Children in the home	8%	19%	27%	25%	21%	312	324	27%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	10%	20%	23%	26%	20%	270	96	31%
Vocational education at secondary school level	5%	14%	28%	28%	25%	145	158	19%
Academic education at secondary school level	7%	19%	28%	25%	21%	121	116	26%
University education	9%	26%	24%	22%	19%	194	378	35%
<b>Position on labour market</b>								
Salaried employment	8%	20%	26%	26%	20%	411	454	28%
Self-employed/employer	6%	23%	29%	29%	13%	74	86	29%
Studying	6%	23%	32%	20%	20%	67	48	29%
Other	12%	19%	19%	24%	26%	201	182	31%
<b>Labour-market status*</b>								
Managers and experts	7%	27%	26%	22%	18%	159	253	34%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	3%	18%	27%	28%	24%	112	118	21%
Office and sales and services personnel	14%	14%	25%	33%	14%	114	93	27%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	3%	17%	34%	26%	21%	69	42	19%
<b>Income of individual*</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	13%	22%	17%	28%	20%	119	79	35%
ISK 201–300 thousand	9%	14%	22%	31%	23%	141	120	23%
ISK 301–400 thousand	7%	21%	29%	17%	25%	120	117	29%
ISK 401–600 thousand	8%	14%	25%	35%	18%	136	177	22%
More than ISK 600 thousand	8%	25%	28%	21%	17%	131	169	33%
<b>Household income*</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	5%	22%	14%	31%	28%	136	93	27%
ISK 301–500 thousand	8%	17%	26%	25%	24%	167	154	25%
ISK 501–700 thousand	10%	18%	31%	27%	14%	114	125	28%
ISK 701–900 thousand	7%	22%	19%	28%	24%	85	108	29%
More than ISK 900 thousand	11%	19%	33%	24%	14%	126	167	29%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow*</b>								
Bright Future	5%	27%	23%	26%	19%	81	84	32%
Progressive Party	10%	25%	28%	23%	14%	83	78	34%
Independence Party	6%	29%	26%	27%	13%	121	138	34%
Alliance Party	12%	20%	21%	28%	20%	90	117	32%
Left-Green Alliance	9%	15%	20%	23%	33%	78	86	24%
Other political party or candidate	5%	12%	26%	28%	30%	83	79	16%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

inv means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

**Table xv. Do you feel that the government has spent great, little or no effort on involving parents when streamlining measures are applied in schools?**

	Very great effort	Rather great effort	Neither great nor little effort	Rather little effort	Very little or no effort	No. after weighting	No. before weighting	Very or rather great effort
<b>Total</b>	4%	10%	27%	29%	30%	710	714	14%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	4%	11%	29%	28%	28%	365	377	15%
Female	4%	10%	25%	29%	33%	345	337	14%
<b>Age**</b>								
18–29 years	3%	13%	28%	37%	18%	125	87	17%
30–44 years	6%	4%	29%	28%	33%	209	209	10%
45–59 years	2%	12%	30%	21%	34%	192	219	14%
Age 60 and older	4%	13%	22%	31%	30%	185	199	17%
<b>Residency*</b>								
Greater Reykjavík area	5%	9%	24%	32%	30%	455	470	14%
Outside Reykjavík area	3%	12%	33%	23%	30%	255	244	15%
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	4%	7%	23%	37%	29%	108	79	11%
Cohabiting	4%	11%	29%	32%	25%	148	143	15%
Married/registered cohabitation	5%	10%	28%	26%	31%	348	381	15%
Divorced or widow/widowed	4%	14%	27%	21%	33%	79	83	18%
<b>Children in the home*</b>								
No children in the home	4%	13%	28%	26%	28%	373	372	17%
Children in the home	4%	6%	26%	31%	32%	314	317	11%
<b>Education</b>								
Primary school education	5%	13%	24%	31%	28%	258	91	17%
Vocational education at secondary school level	5%	8%	20%	31%	36%	126	137	13%
Academic education at secondary school level	3%	9%	36%	27%	24%	112	107	12%
University education	3%	9%	32%	23%	33%	175	339	12%
<b>Position on labour market*</b>								
Salaried employment	3%	10%	27%	28%	32%	389	419	13%
Self-employed/employer	6%	5%	29%	26%	34%	67	78	10%
Studying	0%	12%	36%	38%	13%	61	42	12%
Other	7%	12%	24%	25%	32%	171	154	19%
<b>Labour-market status<sup>inv</sup> (*)</b>								
Managers and experts	2%	9%	30%	29%	30%	146	234	11%
Industrial workers, technicians and specially trained employees	2%	9%	21%	23%	44%	103	109	12%
Office and sales and services personnel	6%	11%	28%	35%	20%	108	84	17%
Farmers, fishermen, machinists and labourers	1%	5%	26%	24%	44%	69	39	7%
<b>Income of individual<sup>inv</sup> (**)</b>								
Less than ISK 200 thousand	2%	13%	25%	40%	20%	101	64	16%
ISK 201–300 thousand	6%	11%	20%	33%	30%	126	104	17%
ISK 301–400 thousand	2%	10%	35%	17%	36%	113	111	12%
ISK 401–600 thousand	3%	6%	23%	36%	32%	120	155	9%
More than ISK 600 thousand	4%	9%	36%	22%	28%	129	162	13%
<b>Household income*</b>								
Less than ISK 300 thousand	1%	10%	19%	45%	25%	108	69	11%
ISK 301–500 thousand	4%	8%	31%	21%	35%	161	145	12%
ISK 501–700 thousand	6%	11%	28%	28%	28%	103	113	16%
ISK 701–900 thousand	3%	8%	25%	30%	34%	80	103	11%
More than ISK 900 thousand	4%	11%	32%	26%	27%	117	151	15%
<b>Political party if elections were tomorrow<sup>inv</sup> (*)</b>								
Bright Future	4%	5%	22%	34%	36%	70	70	9%
Progressive Party	8%	9%	38%	26%	19%	76	70	17%
Independence Party	5%	13%	34%	25%	23%	112	123	18%
Alliance Party	4%	9%	28%	31%	29%	83	107	12%
Left-Green Alliance	1%	5%	24%	29%	41%	72	81	6%
Other political party or candidate	3%	7%	30%	23%	37%	71	69	10%

There is a significant difference in the group; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ,

<sup>inv</sup> means that the data did not meet the criteria for significance testing.

The categories *Very great effort* and *Rather great effort* were merged during statistical processing and significance indicated in parentheses.

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%