

# Equal opportunities and gender equality

In April last year a law came into force in Iceland to eliminate the wage gap between men and women in companies with more than 250 employees, who are required to publish an annual report on their wage structure, with a breakdown by individuals and gender.

Together with this law, which we discussed in [issue 11](#) of *Progreso*, at the beginning of this year the Law on Equal Rights for women and men was passed, in order to establish and maintain equal opportunities and thus promote gender equality in all areas of society, through methods such as the following:

Defining and approving policies and decision-making in all spheres of society that bear gender equality in mind,

Improving the position of women and promoting their opportunities in the labor market,

Promoting a reasonable work/life balance,

Increasing education and awareness about gender equality,

Analysis and research on gender equality,

Combating wage and other forms of gender discrimination in the labor market, gender violence and harassment, and

Fighting negative stereotypes about women's and men's roles.

## Gender institutions

In the first place, the law has created a number of institutions (Gender Equality Center, Gender Claims Committee, Gender Equality Council and Gender Equality Forum) responsible for: i) overseeing the enforcement of this law in all spheres of society, ii) defending the interests of those people affected by breaches of the law and who make complaints, iii) ensuring that people have the opportunity to express and defend their interests on gender issues, and iv) driving forward gender equality, especially in the labor market, and a reasonable work/life balance, among others.

## Wage equality

The law focuses particularly on wage equality and sets out that women and men who work for the same employer must have the same wages and conditions (determined using the same criteria) for the same or equivalent jobs.

It also requires all those companies and institutions with at least 25 employees to acquire a governmental certificate confirming that their wage equality policies meet legal requisites, after submitting to an audit carried out by the certification body. This body must report to the Gender Equality Center on the certificates it has granted and on those instances where it has not been possible to award them, presenting a report with the reasons and results obtained. The certificate must be renewed every three years.

The Gender Equality Center will keep a record of companies and institutions that have obtained the certification and will display this in an accessible place on its website. The record should contain information that includes: i) the names of the companies or institutions, ii) their tax numbers and addresses, iii) whether the company or institution has received certification, and iv) how long the certificate will remain valid. It will also keep a record of those companies and institutions that have not received the certification.

If the provisions in the regulation are breached, the Gender Equality Center will have the power to instruct the company or institution to take appropriate corrective measures within a reasonable time, or else face a monetary fine.

Iceland has taken another step with this law towards gender equality, becoming the first country in the world to demand that companies pay employees carrying out the same functions equally, independently of their gender, race, sexual orientation or nationality.