



Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity



Summary

In 2018 formal preparation for the Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity ("The Prosperity Act") began in Iceland. The first step was to hold a conference with all who wanted to take part in shaping the Act. This included stakeholders, politicians, stakeholders, NGOs, and the public. A declaration of willingness was signed by relevant ministers and an inter-political committee was established, involving representatives from all political parties in the Icelandic Parliament. Consultations and drafting of the Act continued in 2019 through open consultations with hundreds of participants. In 2020 bills were drafted in open cooperation with those who had participated, largely based on the preceding cooperation.

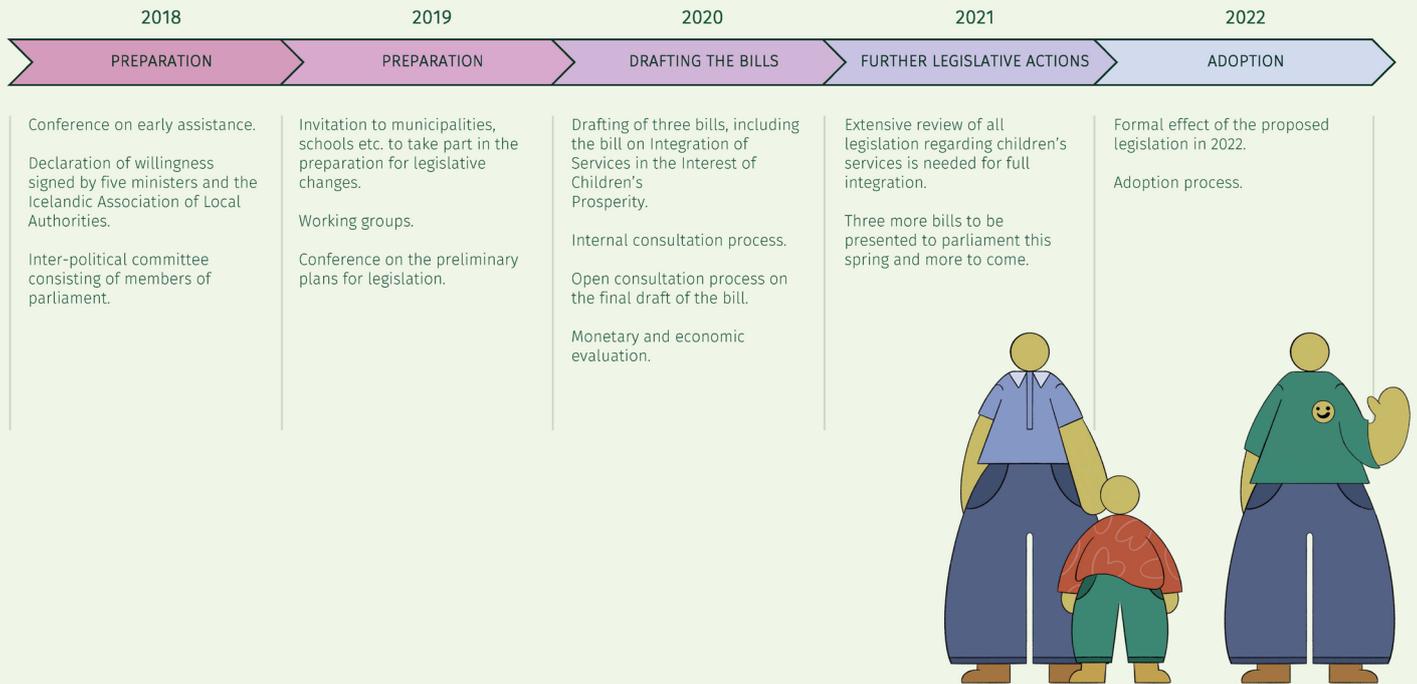
Before the bill was introduced in Parliament, a comprehensive economic impact assessment was performed, calculating costs and projected returns to the government and municipalities -should the Prosperity Act be implemented. The Parliament unanimously approved the Prosperity Act on June 11, 2021, and it came into effect on January 1, 2022. Implementation began immediately across the country, on state and local levels. The implementation phase is expected to take up to five years, or until the end of 2026. The process is an enormous undertaking and involves several groups, committees, teams, elected representatives, ministerial staff, subsidiary agencies, staff from multiple municipalities, and representatives of frontline service providers, parents, and children.

The first years of the implementation phase have focused on creating guiding procedures, regulations, and necessary legislative changes in accordance with the Prosperity act. Simultaneously a strong focus has been placed on sharing information about the Act and its implications

and responsibilities for different sectors, state agencies, and the local level. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Children, collaborating with the National Agency for Children and Families, participated in over a hundred domestic and international presentations on the Prosperity Act.

To further support the implementation of the Act, the Ministry of Education and Children, in cooperation with the University of Iceland, established two lecturer positions at the school's Faculty of Social Work in order to promote teaching and research. In cooperation with the Ministry, the University of Iceland offered a new 30-unit diploma program focused on the Prosperity Act in the autumn of 2022. The Diploma program is now in its first year and received record numbers of applications from diverse professionals all around the country.

By the end of 2022, most Icelandic municipalities had begun implementing the Prosperity Act, but to varying degrees. Many municipalities have appointed a project manager and/or a multidisciplinary steering committee. Several municipalities had reached the point where parents could already request integration of services in accordance with the Prosperity Act, and Contact Persons and Case Managers were employed. Within the areas where the implementation of the Prosperity Act is the furthest along, parents have experienced that the response time for services was quicker than before, and issues were resolved in a more structured way. Children received the support they needed in their local environments and communities sooner than before. The cooperation between Case Managers and liaison officers has worked well and yields good results for children, families, and professionals.



Coordinators and Case Managers

According to the Prosperity Act, children needing early assistance and their families are ensured access to a specific Coordinator in the child's environment. This Coordinator gives information and instructions on services to ensure access to assessments and organises and follows up on the integration of benefits if there is a need for more targeted or specialised assistance than can be provided on the primary level.

The Coordinator works at the primary level and typically works within health care, preschool, primary school, upper secondary school, or within a municipality's social services, wherever a child would seek services regularly according to age.

If children, and their families, need more targeted or specialised assistance, i.e., move up to secondary or tertiary levels, they will be ensured access to a Case Manager within their municipality's social services. The Case Manager will advise and give information on services, assist

with providing access to assessments and/or analysis of a child's needs, be responsible for the creation of a support plan and leading the support team, as well as follow up on the services provided in accordance with the support plan.

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

According to the Prosperity Act, access to a Coordinator and Case Manager is ensured from when a child is born until it reaches 18 years of age. Similar types of services will, if need be, be accessible for parents during pregnancy.

Levels of Services

For the first time in Iceland, services in the interest of children’s prosperity are, according to the Prosperity Act, formally divided into three levels according to the Prosperity Act. By doing so, service providers will have a better overview of systems providing services and a clearer image of how to ensure effective and comprehensive services for every child.

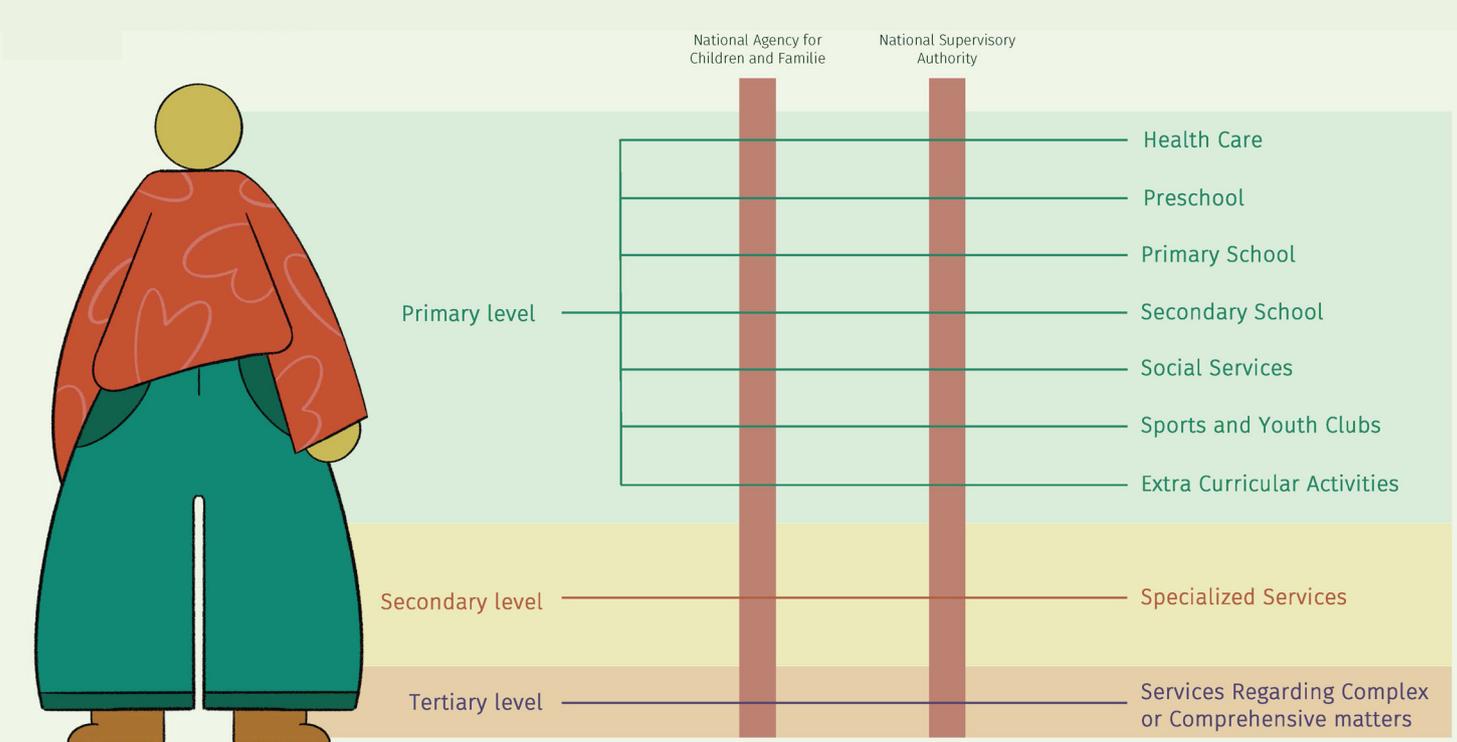
Primary level services include basic services accessible to all children and parents. Also individualised early support, provided with the aim of supporting the prosperity of the child. Early support is provided in accordance with a preliminary assessment of the needs of the child and systematically followed up.

Secondary level services include resources

where individualised and systematic support is provided with the aim of ensuring a child’s prosperity. Systematic support is provided in conformity with professional assessment and/or preliminary analysis of the needs of the child. Effort shall be made to provide a more systematic support on the basis of a support plan on integrated services and follow up.

Tertiary level services include resources where individualised and specialised support is provided with the aim of ensuring that the prosperity of the child is not jeopardised. More specialised support is provided in conformity with specific and thorough assessment and/or analysis of the needs of the child. Efforts shall be made to provide more specific support based on a support plan on integrated services and follow up.

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



Rights of Children and their Families

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

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

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

Support and Supervision of Service Providers

In conjunction with the Prosperity Act, two additional Acts were passed, the Act on The National Agency for Children and Families and the Act on The Quality Inspectorate for Welfare Work.

The National Agency for Children and Families is a centralised advisory centre. It oversees activities and work based on the Child Protection legislation and supports authorities providing services in the interest of children's prosperity, both within state and municipalities. It offers a "toolbox" for resources and supports the processes of certain

individual cases. It also oversees the processing of information in databases and digital solutions supporting the integration of services for children's interests in general and, more specifically, within the realm of child protection.

The Quality Inspectorate for Welfare Work supervises the quality of welfare services and the integration of those services. The Inspectorate adheres to a coordinated supervisory system wherein its supervision is permitted based on user claims and proactive supervision.

Dashboard on Children's Prosperity

The government has developed a dashboard on children's prosperity to monitor children's prosperity in Iceland and to support the implementation of the legislation. The dashboard holds statistics that give an overview of the prosperity of children and young people in Iceland. The data is collected through questionnaires developed together with the University of Iceland and sent to children through their schools. The Ministry of Education and Children is also preparing a new bill on data collection to further support the legislative structure for gathering meaningful data about the well-being of children in Iceland.

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

- 1. Education**
- 2. Quality of Life**
- 3. Health and Wellbeing**
- 4. Security and Protection**
- 5. Participation and Social Connection**

The dashboard provides information that governments and municipalities can be used in the prioritisation of projects, funding, and policy development.

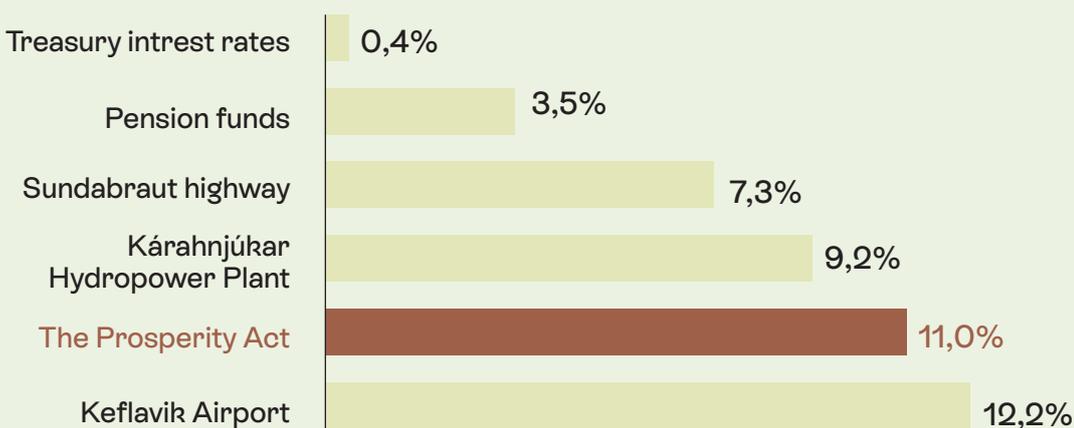
Economic Impact Assessment

During the preparation of the Prosperity Act, the Minister of Education and Children retained a third-party economist to analyse its cost-effectiveness and economic impact for both state and municipalities. The Ministry of Education and Children now has a division for data collection and analysis that will continue the development of evaluation methods, e.g., where action is required, what sort of action is required, and measure the effectiveness of actions.

The analysis projected that implementing the Prosperity Act would reduce adverse childhood experiences and increase children's abilities to work through these experiences. The cost-effectiveness of the changes would take several years to fully realise, that is, until the children that have

received services according to the new legislation reach adulthood. It is clear, however, that the legislation is cost-effective and will yield returns on par with the most profitable investments the Icelandic government has previously undertaken.

During the first years of the Prosperity Act's implementation, costs will be higher than returns. In the long run, returns will far outweigh the costs. The economic analysis concludes that in or around the year 2070, returns should reach 11%. In addition, the Prosperity Act will have no negative environmental impact and only a positive impact on the lives of children and their families, leading to increased overall well-being and prosperity of the nation.



Child Friendly Iceland

In February 2019, the (then) Minister of Social Affairs and Children (now the Minister of Education and Children) presented a proposal to develop a policy on increased participation of children and young people in government policy development and a framework for Child Rights Impact Assessments for all greater decisions affecting children. The government approved the proposal.

Based on this approval, the formation of a policy for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child began. Its objective is to

form a comprehensive frame around the implementation and highlight the steps already taken in Iceland. The policy is based on the General Comments of the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committees' Concluding Observations towards the Icelandic government. The strategy was developed with UNICEF Iceland and other NGOs, other ministries, the Icelandic Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and the Icelandic Youth Council. A strategy draft was opened for open consultation in June 2020 and adapted accordingly. The Parliament approved the strategy on 10 June 2021, which is now being

implemented. The strategy consists of eleven proposals, half of which are already being implemented. This includes a complaint mechanism for Children, which has been established within the office for Ombudsman for Children in Iceland, allowing them to manage individual complaints from children for the first time.

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

To further the work of implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Iceland, the Ministry of Education and Children signed a year-long contract with Child Rights Connect in November 2022. The contract's objectives are to support Iceland's implementation of the Child Friendly Iceland action plan and Iceland's reactions to the Concluding Observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, given to Iceland in 2022. Furthermore, the contract aims to support Iceland to further strengthen its leading role in child rights and child participation at the international level, particularly in its engagement with the UN human rights mechanisms relevant to promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

Collaboration between Iceland and the United Nations

The Minister of Education and Children and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence Against Children signed an agreement of cooperation in New York in February 2023.

The agreement references the Prosperity Act and stipulates the development of integrated procedures and resources for protecting children against violence, along with developing a new methodology that analyses and maps the benefits of communities about their investment in services for children.

In the coming years, representatives of the United Nations and other international partners will work closely on this project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Children, along with a special steering committee of international and Icelandic experts.

The cooperation includes the development and publication of procedures and tools that protect children from violence while demonstrating the economic benefits of such actions.