

The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

Practicing Democracy in Times of Crisis

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The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

October 2008 in Iceland:

- The banks collapsed
- The Icelandic nation lost its credibility abroad
- Common feeling among the Icelandic people:
Anger- disbelief - desperation
lack of confidence – sadness and grief –
bleak vision of the future



The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

- First reactions were somewhat bewildered
- Almost in every field people expected the worst

All political parties
promised to
protect the Welfare system





The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

- The Government of Iceland decided in February 2009 to establish a Welfare Watch in order to monitor the consequences of the financial crisis on individuals and families
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- A Steering group - cross-sectoral approach
- Partnership of NGO's, Social Actors and local and state governments on welfare issues

Meeting with the
Minister of Welfare
September 2011



WELFARE WATCH

Association of Academics

Icelandic Red Cross

Association of Local Authorities

Icelandic Teacher's Union

City of Reykjavik

Ministry of Economic Affairs

Confederation of Icelandic Employers

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Confederation of Icelandic Employees

Ministry of Finance

Deptor's Ombudsman

Ministry of Interior

Directorate of Health

Ministry of Welfare

Directorate of Labour

The National Church

Federation of State and Municipal Employees

Umbrella organizations of Disabled Persons

Gender Equality Council

The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

Main objectives:

- Collect information on what had already been put into action – and had it helped?
- Collect information regarding the consequences of the financial crisis
- Present recommendations to the Minister and the government

“ An Independent observing Body making proposals to the Government and NGO’s” June 2011



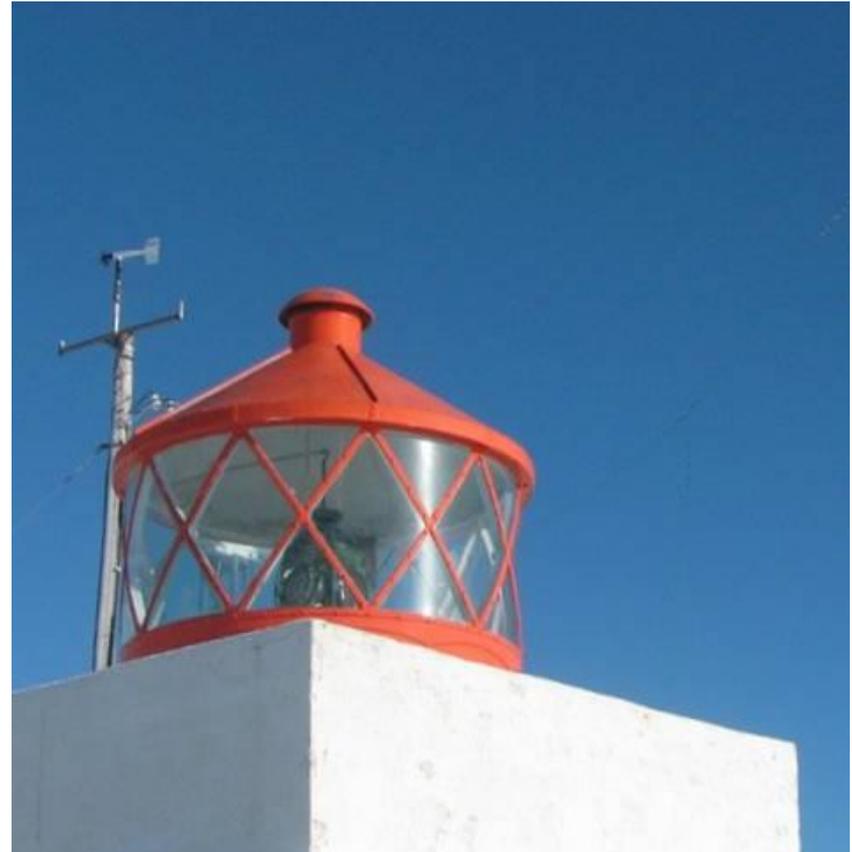
The Welfare Watch

2009 – 2013

The first steps!

Simple advice in times of crises!

- Exercise, eat, sleep and mingle
- Stay active in leisure and work
- Look at the bright sides of life



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Guiding lights for the work

- Recommendations should at all times be based on reliable information and research
- Get all partners of society to unite behind the activities to protect the Welfare system
- **Public Awareness** and a shared responsibility



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- **Working Groups established supporting the Steering Group**

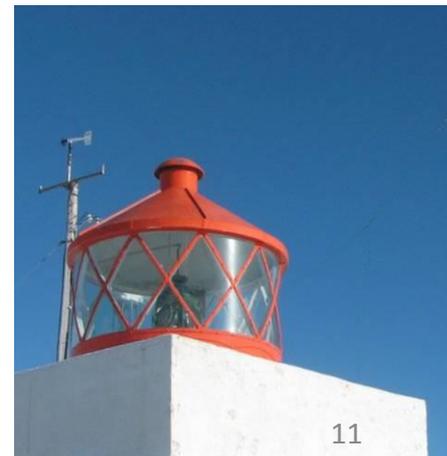
More than 100 individuals took active part

- **Cooperation in all directions**
Information from the community to the Welfare Watch and on to the government and local authorities
 - **Cooperation with Research- and University Community**



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- Children (under 18 years)
- Youth and Young Persons (15–25 years)
- The Unemployed
- Marginalized Individuals and Groups
- The Financial Situation of the Families (Homes in Dept.)
- Health in Times of Crisis
- Social Indicators
- The Basic Services provided by the Local Authorities and the State
- Cooperation across municipalities in one vulnerable area- *The Sudurnes Watch*



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The *Red Thread* in the Steering group and all working groups:

Focus on the **Children's Welfare** in all areas

Young Families with Children – low income families



And:

Long-term unemployment and - Unemployment among young people-need to collect information on the situation of children with both parents unemployed.

Vulnerable Groups

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- **Appeals to all local authorities falls** 2009 – 2010 – 2011-2012 -2013

Lunch should be provided to all schoolchildren, and extra costs for families kept as low as possible

- **Letter to the MPs** in June 2010 Challenging them to focus on those who are in most vulnerable situations and prioritize accordingly
- **Earnest request to the Budget- and Social Comitees of Parliament and Local governments** on caution in cut backs in Welfare Services
- **Appeals to the Minister of Health** to ensure dental services for children in poor families, 2010 and 2013
- **Letter to the Minister of Social Affairs** on securing employemet and acess to training for young people (16-25 years of age.)



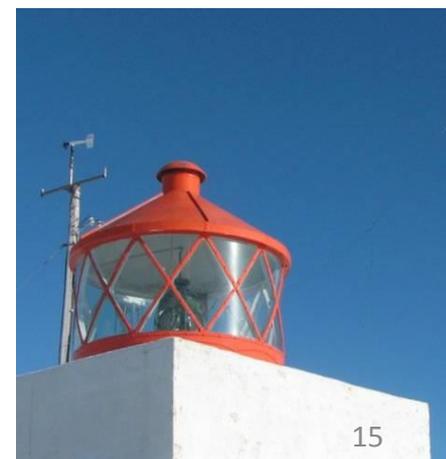
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- Payments to parents taking maternity/paternity leave and parental leave should not be reduced any further, and should preferably be restored to their former level.
- Cuts in the parental leave programme are resulting in preventing fathers taking their leave
- Might have consequences for the children and equal rights of men and women



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- Under the auspices of the Welfare Watch a specialist group was established on the compilation of social indicators.
- The preparatory work is completed with the first report on social indicators. The government has handed the responsibility over to the National Statistics of Iceland.
- The social indicators are presented by the institute regularly as well as in Statistical Series focusing on specific issues such as children and poverty in Nov. 2014.



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Define and Protect public Basic Services

- The level of basic services must be ensured with no lowering of the standard of services available to the most vulnerable groups (Report in Dec. 2009).
- Satisfactory information must be at hand regarding the consequences of decisions for clients of the services.



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Define and Protect public Basic Services

- Flat-rate cuts across the board should be avoided, streamlining measures in strictly defined areas should rather be implemented.
- Rationalizing and savings in one area must not result in increased expenditure and strain in other areas of public services.
- When any decision on streamlining is announced, it shall be stated whether it is a temporary measure and if for how long it is to apply.



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The Well-Being Watch has urged the Icelandic Community to be aware

..that lost opportunities in childhood may not be restored later in life

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Strong engagement and interest of members

- Broad ownership – members host the meetings
- No one is paid for work or participation – members and stakeholders enable the activities and provide the mandate.
- Consensus on main issues and on all recommendations.
- Backup from the Minister

Nevertheless an independant consultant to state- and local authorities



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- The watch was on duty at all times and used the independence from the Minister to present a variety of recommendations
- The co-operation within the watch resulted in a broad and improved co-operation between institutions and the administration of welfare provisions.
- Information from the thorough investigation on different welfare issues was taken back to the shareholders.

