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## "Do you call this equality?": Iceland experiences historic feminist strike day



Miles de mujeres se han reunido en la colina de Arnarhól, en el centro de Reikiavik Oficina de la UE en Islandia

Sources: [www.eldiario.es](http://www.eldiario.es)

*The protest, which has had a massive following and has been joined by the Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, denounces the wage gap and gender violence in the country, considered a benchmark in terms of equality.*

Iceland came to a standstill on Tuesday in a historic feminist strike in the Nordic country, the largest since 1975, 48 years ago. Under the slogan "Is that what you call equality?", Icelandic women were called on not to go to work or perform any other unpaid domestic

tasks in protest at the persistence of the wage gap and gender-based violence in Iceland, despite being considered a benchmark country in terms of equality.

The strike, called by the main trade unions and 40 feminist associations, has been widely followed. Women and non-binary people were called to the protest and, since early in the morning, it has had an impact on schools, hospitals, shops (where mostly only men were seen working), and on municipal services, which have been reduced.

The strike has also been noticed on the broadcasts of the public radio and television network RÚV, and has led to several cancellations of flights of the IcelandAir airline, where more than half of its workers are women. According to the [Morgunblaðið](#) newspaper, morning traffic in Reykjavik has decreased by 28% compared to a normal Tuesday, in a day that has concluded with a demonstration with thousands of people walking the streets of the capital.

The country's Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, has also joined the protest by postponing the Governing Council meeting for the following day and asking the other ministers of the Executive not to come to work either. The day before the strike, Jakobsdóttir told the Icelandic media that she was joining the strike with the intention of "showing solidarity with [Icelandic](#) women. As you know, we have not yet reached our full gender equality goals and we are still addressing the gender pay gap, which is unacceptable in 2023."

### **Far from the "paradise of gender equality"**

According to the World Economic Forum, Iceland has topped the list of countries in the world with the highest gender equality for 14 years in a row. However, data from the Icelandic government shows that leading the equality rankings does not mean that differences do not exist: "Iceland is talked about as if it were a paradise of equality," [said](#) Freyja Steingrimsdóttir, director of communications for the Icelandic Federation of Public Workers (BSRB), one of the unions calling the strike.

But for Steingrimsdóttir, "a paradise of equality should not have a pay gap of 21% and 40% of women who suffer sexual or gender-based violence throughout their lives. That's not what women around the world are fighting for," said the union spokeswoman. Steingrimsdóttir also wanted to point out that Iceland has a global reputation for gender equality, and therefore "has a responsibility to make sure that we live up to those expectations."

Since 2018, Iceland became the first country to require companies to prove that they pay their employees fairly for performing the same duties. However, the unions denounce that the companies are still lagging behind the legislation and feminist demands.

In addition, for Tatjana Latinovic, president of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association, another aspect to take into account to understand wage inequality is that "the so-called women's jobs (cleaners, caregivers of the elderly, workers in nurseries) are now occupied by foreign women, because it is difficult to find people who work with the low salaries they offer." Currently, immigrant women make up 22 per cent of the Icelandic female labour market, but [according to trade unions](#), their contribution to society is not reflected in the wages these women receive.

According to the Government, it is studying how jobs that are mostly held by women are economically valued on average compared to jobs mostly held by men, as it believes that this factor clearly contributes to the current wage disparity.

### **Equality Is Not Advancing**

The other major demand of the strike has been to end gender-based violence, which [the mayor of Reykjavik, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, described on](#) television as a "real epidemic that we must face with the same seriousness with which we face COVID". The programme broadcast on the public broadcaster RÚV gave as an example a study carried out by the University of Iceland in 2018, which revealed that one in four women has experienced sexual violence in her lifetime.

The unions organising the strike [have also pointed](#) out that, during the day of protest, "husbands, fathers, brothers and uncles were expected to take on the responsibilities of the family and the home, for example by preparing breakfast and lunch, remembering family birthdays, buying gifts for the mother-in-law or scheduling the children's appointment to the dentist" among the many other tasks and responsibilities that are normally carried out by the women women.

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Source: [https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/le-llamas-igualdad-islandia-vive-jornada-huelga-feminista-historica\\_1\\_10626436.html](https://www.eldiario.es/internacional/le-llamas-igualdad-islandia-vive-jornada-huelga-feminista-historica_1_10626436.html)

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