

## Country Profile - Iceland

---

### Job market

#### What are my chances of getting a job?

Iceland was hit particularly hard by the global economic crisis and the unemployment level rose drastically during the period 2008-09. As a result of this, the Icelandic government took control of all three of the country's major banks. The country remains in the process of stabilising its currency and repairing its severely damaged financial sector. Until the situation has improved, job opportunities will be limited.

However, due to growth in the software development sector there is a small shortage of computer scientists and software developers of all kinds. Also, within the health sector there is a shortage of around 100 doctors.

- **Typical problems encountered:** Iceland has a well-educated population and British graduates will need to compete with skilled workers.
- **How to improve your chances:** skilled workers earn higher wages so if applicable it can be worth spending a few years after graduation building up relevant skills before you move to Iceland.
- **Language requirements:** it is essential you have a good grasp of the Icelandic language if you are going to seriously compete for employment and opportunities.

#### Where can I work?

- **Major industries:** fish processing, aluminium smelting, ferrosilicon production, geothermal power, hydropower, tourism.
- **Recent growth areas:** new developments in software production, biotechnology, and tourism.
- **Industries in decline:** construction, and to a lesser degree, fishing.
- **Major companies:** SIF Ltd, Actavis, Ossur, Alcan, Frisk Software International, Icelandair Group, Marel, Nýherji, Orkuveita Reykjavíkur.
- **Search for more companies:** [Iceland Chambers of Commerce](#), [Gula linan \(Icelandic Yellow Pages\)](#).
- **Major cities:** Reykjavik (capital and largest), Kopavogur, Hafnarfjordur, Akureyri.

#### What's it like working in Iceland?

- **Average working hours:** 40 per week. Icelanders tend to work hard and sometimes long hours to maintain their high living standards. Working overtime is common but employers do pay workers for any overtime they do.
- **Holidays:** Minimum of 24 days leave plus 13 public holidays.
- **Tax rates:** progressive tax rate starting at 37%, rising to 46% depending on salary.

---

### Applying for jobs

Application procedures in Iceland are very similar to those in the UK. You normally apply by CV and covering letter. It is advantageous to write these in Icelandic, but applications in English or a Scandinavian language are also accepted.

Icelandic CVs are usually brief and only cover one page of A4. Your CV should include:

- personal details;
- education;
- work experience;
- skills and other qualifications;
- personal interests and positions of trust;
- contact details for two referees.

Your application should also include copies of diplomas, references from former employers (in Icelandic preferably, or otherwise in either English or a Scandinavian language) and any other relevant supporting material. It is common to attach a photo. Covering letters should be no longer than one page and should highlight your most attractive qualities.

As with everywhere else, application procedures can vary and will be detailed in the job advert. You can find an example of an Icelandic CV at [Eures Iceland Jobseeker](#).

### **Will my UK qualifications be recognised?**

[Europass](#) is a free online facility that helps students and job seekers to highlight their educational and working achievements. The Europass portfolio consists of five documents that help potential employers, educational establishments and training providers understand which subjects you have studied, what training you have done and how much experience has been gained while working. It also records non-formal learning and language skills. The five documents are:

- Europass CV – can be completed online and is recognised throughout Europe;
- Language passport – highlights your language skills and qualifications;
- Mobility supplement - a record of skills and experience gained whilst learning or working in Europe;
- Certificate Supplement - helps people understand the level of your vocational qualifications;
- Diploma Supplement - helps people understand the level of your higher education qualifications.

If you wish to compare your professional, vocational or technical qualifications with Icelandic qualifications, you can consult the [UK National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications \(NRP\)](#).

More information on the comparability of your academic qualifications is also available from [ENIC-NARIC](#).

### **Do I still need to pay UK tax and National Insurance?**

If you are planning to live and work in Iceland, check your UK tax and National Insurance position with [HM Revenue & Customs \(HMRC\)](#) to ensure that you are not losing any UK pension rights.

---

## **Vacancy sources**

### **Job websites**

[EURES - European Job Mobility Portal](#) is maintained by the European Commission and provides information about job vacancies, living and working conditions and labour markets in Iceland, as well as a CV-posting service for jobseekers.

### Recruitment agencies

Contact details for recruitment agencies are available from:

- [Directorate of Labour Iceland - Vinnumala Stofnun](#)
- [Gula linan \(Icelandic Yellow Pages\)](#)

### Newspapers

- [Morgunbladið](#) - an online news site with job adverts.
- [Fréttablaðið](#) - (translation: The Newspaper) Icelandic newspaper with largest circulation - delivered daily free of charge to homes in Iceland.
- Access to Icelandic newspapers is also available through [Kidon Media-Link](#).

### Other sources

- The business section at [Iceland on the Web](#) provides links to hundreds of Icelandic companies sorted by category.
- Tourist information websites often list Icelandic companies according to sector. [Randburg.com - Iceland](#) has some useful links.
- Contact the local branch of your professional or trade union (*stéttarfélag*). They have information on the current employment trends within your profession and can give advice on where to start looking. The [Icelandic Confederation of Labour](#) is built up out of trade unions and represents over half the workforce in Iceland.
- The [Ministry of Industry and Trade - Iceland](#) provides information about trade and industry in Iceland and may be useful if you are planning to set up your own business in the country.

### Hidden vacancies

It is possible to make speculative applications to employers. Some job hunters put in adverts for employment in newspapers. You should investigate the employer/organisation thoroughly before you take up any offer of employment.

---

## Work experience

### Work placements and internships

Placements can be arranged through organisations in the UK such as:

- [AIESEC \(Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales\)](#)
- [IAESTE \(The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience\)](#)

Contact them for help in finding possible internships and placements.

### Exchange programmes

Your institution may be involved in the [Leonardo da Vinci Programme](#), which is funded by the European Commission and can arrange placements in other countries for between

three weeks and 12 months. Contact your institution's international office or careers service for more information.

## Teaching schemes

There are very few opportunities to teach English in Iceland. Any jobs advertised are usually based in Reykjavik. Search for job postings on sites such as [ESL Jobs](#).

## Volunteering

Environmental and conservation work is popular. Volunteers are needed to clear the coastline, plant trees, repair stone walls and maintain and build coastal paths and bicycle trails. Volunteers are also needed to help organise and host events such as cultural festivals and environmental awareness events. Work often involves helping to set up exhibitions, making props, taking part in craft demonstrations, drama performances and historical re-enactments. The [International Voluntary Service \(IVS\) in Britain](#) provides links to many opportunities.

## Casual work

There is also the possibility of doing casual work in Iceland. In the summer you may have the opportunity to work in hotels such as [Fosshotel](#). Icelandic farmers recruit workers for a variety of positions, including sheep and horse rounding, horse training, regular farm work and gardening/horticulture.

Positions are mostly available in the spring and summer and accommodation and food is usually heavily subsidised or in some cases provided for free. Farm work applicants are usually required to have a driving licence. [Ninukot](#) lists a range of vacancies and has further information and application forms. See also the seasonal work section at [Eures Iceland](#) for more information.

## Gap year opportunities

There are opportunities to work in several sectors, mostly in the Icelandic countryside. You can choose between working on a farm, gathering hay, growing vegetables in greenhouses, taking care of children, working in hotels or processing fish in small fishing villages on the coast. These paid opportunities last between 3-12 months and low cost accommodation is usually provided by the employer.

---

## Postgraduate study

### How does the higher education system work?

There are seven universities in Iceland, with some small institutions offering diploma courses. Most of the universities are state-owned with the remainder being privately owned but with government support. There are approximately 18,000 students enrolled in the higher education system, of which about 5% are international students.

Icelandic is the language of instruction in higher education institutions in Iceland. However, in some places individual courses are taught in English. Many textbooks are in English or other foreign languages (mostly German or a Scandinavian language).

[The University of Iceland's Office of International Education](#) represents the higher education institutions in Iceland and can assist foreign students by providing them with information on study opportunities.

## What courses are available?

Masters courses usually take two years and PhD study, which can be started after obtaining a Masters degree, takes three to five years to complete.

Institutions of higher education differ in the extent to which they engage in research, but some of the main areas are listed below. A portion of funds granted by the Icelandic research council go to international projects so possibilities do exist to become involved in postgraduate work or research. The main areas of research are:

- food products;
- biomedical research;
- Icelandic society and culture;
- geological, volcanological and seismic research;
- construction;
- biological research;
- fisheries.

## Where can I study?

There are seven universities in Iceland, which are as follows:

State owned:

- [University of Iceland](#)
- [University of Akureyri](#)
- [Agricultural University of Iceland](#)

Privately owned:

- [Reykjavik University](#)
- [Bifrost University](#)
- [Holar University College](#)
- [Iceland Academy of the Arts](#)

There is also [REYST - The School for Renewable Energy Science](#) which is a graduate school run as a non-profit company by shareholders from the energy industry).

Contact details for universities in Iceland are available from [The University of Iceland's Office of International Education](#).

## Applying for postgraduate study

A certified BA or BS degree is required to pursue postgraduate studies, but each university sets their own requirements. Prospective candidates should make initial inquiries with the department. Most overseas applicants will need to provide proof of their financial status and if the course is in Icelandic, proven proficiency in the Icelandic language.

Application forms are available from and submitted directly to the institution, either online or by post. In most cases applicants will have to submit a CV, official transcripts, one or more personal statements and two letters of recommendation.

In some circumstances students need to identify a potential supervisor and work with them to prepare a research proposal, which they submit along with a copy of the supervisor's CV.

## **Fees and scholarships**

State-run Icelandic institutions of higher education do not charge tuition fees. Candidates pay a small annual registration fee after they receive a letter of admission. Privately run higher education institutions charge tuition fees that vary but are low compared with other European institutions.

Individuals from the European Union (EU) member states and the EEA-EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), who have worked at their trade or profession in Iceland for at least one year, are entitled to apply for a student loan. The [Icelandic Student Loan Fund](#) may grant loans to other foreign students if reciprocal agreements exist between their countries of origin and Iceland.

Loans are not offered for studies that form part of paid employment under an employment contract (this applies, for example, to postgraduate studies by doctors).

The [Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland](#) annually offers a limited number of scholarships to foreign students to pursue studies in Icelandic language and literature at the University of Iceland.

Grants are available for postgraduate, research-oriented studies at universities in Iceland. The grants are awarded on the basis of a research proposal submitted jointly by a student and professor. The respective university faculty must also approve the research proposals. Contact your prospective university and enquire if any funding is available.

## **Are there any exchange programmes?**

UK students on undergraduate degree programmes or postgraduate Masters and some PhD programmes may be interested in spending time studying in Iceland through the [Erasmus](#) scheme. This programme is open to all subject areas, but check with your institution's Erasmus coordinator first (usually based in the international office) to see which countries they have links with and in what subject areas.

## **Will my qualification be recognised in the UK?**

Candidates should check with [ENIC-NARIC](#) to enquire whether the qualification they want to study for in Iceland will be recognised in the UK.

See [The University of Iceland's Office of International Education](#) for more information on preparing for further study in Iceland.

---

## **Visa and travel information**

## Visa requirements and applications

Most EU nationals do not need a visa or work permit. Most citizens of EU countries may stay and work in Iceland without a permit for up to three months or if searching for employment may stay for up to six months. If they intend to stay for longer a resident permit must be applied for, which is usually granted automatically to EU citizens.

In addition to this, for a stay of over three months you need to submit a notice of moving to register your legal domicile. You or your employer should contact the municipal authorities.

Citizens of non-EU member countries may need a visa and/or a work permit.

From 2012, Bulgarians and Romanians no longer need to get residence permits to work in Iceland.

If you are from a non-EU country, contact the Icelandic Embassy in the country where you are currently residing. If you are in the UK, go to the [Embassy of Iceland](#).

More information can be found at the [Icelandic Directorate of Immigration](#).

## Permanent residency

A foreigner who has resided in Iceland continuously for the preceding three years, holding an unconditional residence permit and who has taken courses in Icelandic for foreigners, may apply for a permanent residence permit. Applications for permanent residence permits are available from the [Icelandic Directorate of Immigration](#).

## Help in an emergency

The [British Embassy in Iceland](#) can provide a range of help for UK citizens who find themselves in emergency situations, including loss or theft of passport, arrest or imprisonment, serious illness, being a victim of crime and searching for missing friends or relatives.

Healthcare facilities in Iceland are of a high Western standard. However, the distances between facilities can be great and whilst most towns have a health centre or basic hospital, serious cases generally necessitate transfer to a hospital in either Reykjavik or Akureyri.

Under the terms of the EEA Regulation, UK nationals are covered for emergency treatment while they are in Iceland. However, to get the treatment you will need a [European Health Insurance Card \(EHIC\)](#), which you should get before leaving the UK.

The emergency contact number for police, fire and ambulance is 112.

Other emergency contact details are available from the [Government of Iceland](#).

## Travel advice

Find the latest travel advice and a traveller's checklist on the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) website.

---

## Country overview

### Geography

- **Full country name:** Republic of Iceland
- **Population:** 313,183 (World Fact Book, July 2012)
- **Border countries:** none
- **Climate:** temperate, with mild winters and wet, cool summers.
- **Terrain:** mostly plateau interspersed with mountain peaks and icefields; coasts are deeply indented by bays and fiords.
- **Natural hazards:** earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are commonplace.

### Living in Iceland

- **Cost of living:** Iceland has a higher than average cost of living, especially in its capital Reykjavík. Grocery items, restaurant/hotel food, alcohol and tobacco, transport and general services are all relatively more expensive compared with other countries. The cost of accommodation, telephone/internet, education, healthcare and entertainment is similar to that in other cities.
- **Utilities:** electricity is generated through geothermal and hydroelectric sources and, as a result, utility costs are extremely low.
- **Internet domain:** .is
- **Health:** life expectancy is 81 years for men and 84 years for women (UN, 2010).
- **Laws and customs:** possession of even small quantities of soft drugs can lead to heavy fines and/or imprisonment. Alcohol limits for drivers are far stricter than UK levels. Penalties for driving under the influence are severe.

### Economy and finance

- **Currency:** Icelandic Krona (ISK)
- **Type of economy:** capitalist but supports an extensive welfare state.
- **Health of economy:** Iceland's economy and global reputation is seriously weakened as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis. It is however slowly getting its economy back on track with help from government aid, natural untapped resources and its educated workforce.
- **Unemployment rate:** 7.4%
- **Main exports:** fish and fish products, metals.

### Culture

- **People:** mixture of descendants of Norse and Celts (94%) and population of foreign origin (6%).
- **Major religion:** Christianity (Lutheran)
- **History:** Iceland was settled by Vikings and Celts in the 9th and 10th century AD. In the Middle Ages, Iceland became a Norwegian, and later Danish, colony gaining Home Rule in 1904 and then separate sovereign status under the Danish crown in 1918. During World War II the country was occupied by British and US forces and became an independent republic on 17 June 1944. See [BBC Timeline: Iceland](#) for an outline of Icelandic history.

## Politics

- **Type of government:** constitutional republic
- **Major political parties:** Independence Party, Social Democratic Alliance, Progressive Party, Left-Green Movement, The Movement.

## More information

- [Embassy of Iceland in London](#)
- [Iceland BBC Country Profile](#)
- [The World Factbook](#)
- [XE Universal Currency Converter](#)

Written by AGCAS editors, September 2012

© Content copyright of or licensed to AGCAS ([www.agcas.org.uk](http://www.agcas.org.uk))  
To view the terms and conditions for the material provided in this publication, please see:  
[www.agcas.org.uk/disclaimer](http://www.agcas.org.uk/disclaimer)