



## European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

### FLASH REPORT

<b>Country:</b>	Iceland
<b>Title:</b>	Professor leaves University of Iceland due to sexual harassment
<b>Date:</b>	08 January 2019
<b>Expert:</b>	Herdís Thorgeirsdóttir
<b><u>Context</u></b>	
<b>Issue at stake:</b>	Sexual harassment
<b>Ground of discrimination:</b>	Sex
<b>Source:</b>	Miscellaneous
<b>Field:</b>	Employment
<b>Applicable law:</b>	Gender Equality Act No. 10/2008

### **Content**

The newspaper *Fréttablaðið* reported on 19 December 2018 that a professor at the University of Iceland has resigned in the department of public health sciences stating that people should know the reason why women are fleeing the University. She was sexually harassed by her superior with whom she had difficult relations.

The newspaper quotes the professor: "During the summer of 2016 I expressed my concern due to the difficult relationship I have had with my superior who harassed me sexually during an employee interview. I got no reaction after my complaint and the situation got worse until it became unbearable and then I slapped him. The reaction of the University of Iceland was contrary to what I would have expected as no attempt was made to investigate my complaint although I had provided evidence on serious violence and harassment. I was told to leave the workplace and go on sick leave. When I refused I was threatened with admonition which the University was not able to follow up on as they had no case. The professor who is named in the newspaper *Fréttablaðið* says it was difficult to protect her reputation in a small society where gossip travels faster than light but she finally gained strength to bring a formal complaint to the Ethics Committee of the University of Iceland which issued a ruling in July 2018 confirming that the professor's superior had violated three provisions of the University's code of ethics, among them the non-discrimination clause 1.3.2 which provides that the staff and students of the University of Iceland may not discriminate one another on the basis of sex (and other numerated factors) or harass one another and be aware of characteristic harassment symptoms.

The Professor claims that despite the confirmation of the Ethics Committee with whom the rector of the University had a meeting she has still not heard a word from the rector during the four months that have passed since and that the situation with her superior is as bad as before. For this reason the Professor states that she must resign from her post.

It remains to be seen whether the Professor will take her case before the Gender Equality Complaints Committee cf., Art. 5 of the GEA.

The Gender Equality Act No. 10/2008 provides in its Article 2 a definition of two kinds of harassment:

Gender-based harassment: Conduct which is connected with the sex of the person affected by it, is unwelcome to the person in question and is intended to impair the self-respect of the person in question and create a situation that is threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or insulting for the person in question, or which has this effect. 4. Sexual harassment: Any type of sexual behaviour which is unwelcome to the person affected by it and is intended to impair the self-respect of the person concerned, or which has this effect, particularly when the behaviour results in a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or insulting situation. The behaviour may be verbal, non-verbal and/or physical.

Article 22 of the GEA on gender-based violence, gender-based harassment and sexual harassment provides that; employers and the directors of institutions and non-governmental organisations shall take special measures to protect employees, students and clients from [gender-based violence, gender-based harassment or sexual harassment]1) in the workplace, in institutions, in their work for, or the functions of, their societies, or in schools. If a superior is charged with [alleged gender-based violence, alleged gender-based harassment or alleged sexual harassment],1) he or she shall be non-competent to take decisions regarding the working conditions of the claimant during the examination of the case, and the next superior shall take such decisions. 1) Act No. 62/2014, Article 3. A.

**Internet link source:**

<https://www.frettabladid.is/frettir/haettir-sem-professor-i-hi-i-kjoelfar-areitni?fbclid=IwAR1X3331aQFg-yJnAvbLW-QMZt1g78jvvcG-KJrUWEFz6CXmXbvHFXNH520>.