

## **Resolution by the Althing**

### **on a Strategic Regional Plan, 2006-2009**

The Icelandic parliament, or Althing, resolves to charge the Government to work towards implementing a Strategic Regional Plan for the period of 2006-2009. The objectives of the plan will be to improve conditions for living outside the area of the capital and to increase the country's competitive capability, by building on the following principal objectives:

- a. Strengthening regional centres, while also making a special effort to find ways of maintaining population levels in areas that have been struggling with long-term population decline
- b. Enabling rural communities to adjust to the fast pace of societal developments and rapid changes in industrial structure
- c. Supporting employment, education and culture and promoting social equality in areas distant from the capital.

Special emphasis will be placed on the importance of education and culture, additional endeavours to promote innovation and progress in industry, improvements in transport and communications, and augmentation of the regional centres of Akureyri, Ísafjörður, and central East Iceland, as well as other important centres of employment and services outside the area of the capital.

Three main principles shall serve as guidelines for governmental authorities during the Regional Development Plan's period of validity, i.e.:

- a. To boost education in regions outside the area of the capital
- b. To increase the number of government jobs in regions outside the area of the capital
- c. To bolster the Institute of Regional Development and enable it, through appropriations in the national budget, to carry out important projects in the field of regional development.

The chief measures undertaken in order to achieve the Plan's objectives shall be as follows:

1. *Improving transportation and roads:* Efforts shall be made to improve transportation and road systems and to develop public transport outside of the capital area, on the basis of a transportation plan that takes into account the importance of these factors in boosting population levels. The Institute of Regional Development shall assess such measures, in cooperation with the Icelandic Road Administration.
2. *Strengthening local government:* National and local authorities shall make a concerted effort to transfer tasks from the national government to local authorities. At the same time, efforts shall be made to consolidate or to establish cooperation among local governments in any employment and service area which comprises a comprehensive whole and will take on these new tasks.
3. *Improving telecommunications:* In accordance with a telecommunications plan, there shall be ongoing efforts to ensure reliable telecommunications and to improve data-transfer capacity in areas away from the capital, working also towards an evening out of differences in data-transfer costs.

4. *Preparing and implementing growth agreements:* Work shall be undertaken on preparing and implementing regional growth agreements, with public and private bodies joining in measures to strengthen their competitive ability and stimulate economic growth. The success of these agreements shall be evaluated regularly.

5. *Gathering and processing statistical data on regional development:* The systematic gathering and processing of statistical data on regional development shall be organised during 2006, so that regular gathering and processing by the Institute of Regional Development can start at the beginning of 2007.

6. *Preparing for the development of regional plans:* The conclusions of the European Union's Northern Periphery Programme on area planning in the Far North are to be examined, investigating the advantages of formulating regional plans on that basis which would together cover all of Iceland.

7. *Finding out the status of communities experiencing long-term population decline:* The status of communities that have been struggling with long-term population decline is to be studied, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses and analysing possibilities for strengthening these communities.

8. *Boosting business development:* Rural area support systems for business development and innovation shall be coordinated and their activities made more effective. The Impra Innovation Centre in Akureyri and business development associations shall be assured a secure basis for ongoing operation.

9. *Promoting research, technological development, and innovation:* In 2006, a plan shall be developed for substantially furthering research, technological development, and innovation in areas away from the capital. This plan shall span the sectors of energy, fisheries, tourism, and agriculture, among others, and define the fields of emphasis and the forms of cooperation. Such cooperation shall be conducted as a development project throughout the term of the regional development plan.

10. *Expanding knowledge clusters and university-level research and learning centres:* Efforts shall continue towards expanding knowledge clusters and university-level research and learning centres outside the capital area.

11. *Increasing distributed learning at every educational level:* The advantages of distributed learning, which combines the methods of distance education and classroom teaching, shall be utilised so as to provide a wide range of educational programmes at every educational level, by means of cooperation among institutions. This shall involve facilitating the cooperation of universities on distance learning, among other things. In places remote from the capital, particular subject fields in vocational education shall be defined as targets, and there shall be efforts to strengthen these fields through the cooperation of secondary schools, private enterprise, and the mother school for each vocational field.

12. *Bolstering continuing education:* The range of continuing education courses available to students living away from the capital shall be increased by means of cooperation between continuing-education centres and the Education and Training Service Centre. Cooperation between continuing-education centres and secondary schools on vocational training for adults shall also be encouraged.

13. *Promoting cultural activities:* There shall be ongoing work to negotiate cultural agreements with local government authorities. Greater cooperation shall be facilitated between museums and between libraries both within the part of Iceland that is removed from the capital and also between these institutions and the country's principal museums and libraries. The possibilities shall be investigated of producing and distributing cultural material and television programmes that stem from areas outside the capital, through the use of such new technologies as digital television.

There shall be efforts to further sports programmes and youth activities in places outside the capital area.

14. *Utilising information technology*: Work shall be conducted to make the fruits of the experimental project on the electronic society available to other communities distant from the capital.

15. *Improving medical services*: There shall be efforts to improve health services outside the capital area, for instance by transferring certain health-related services from the national government to local authorities. There shall be further development and full implementation of the health network which among other things serves to connect health-care institutions and allow for telemedicine.

16. *Increasing services for immigrants; increased cultural diversity*: There shall be a concerted effort to ensure the mutual adaptation of immigrants and Icelandic society. Whether it is a viable option to establish service centres for immigrants shall be studied in response to the initiatives of residents in each region.

17. *Analysing opportunities for traditional local industries; strengthening public services*: The position of agriculture, fisheries, and industry in areas distant from the capital shall be surveyed, analysing the chief opportunities and possibilities for innovation in these traditional sectors. Consideration shall be given to whether public services to these employment sectors could be strengthened at places away from the capital, for example by transferring certain tasks.

18. *Expanding services for tourists*: Efforts shall be made towards the substantial expansion of tourist services outside the capital area, emphasising the special character of each section of the country and the organisation of growth zones. An endeavour shall be made to improve the facilities for tourists in national parks, assuring that they have safe access.

19. *Assisting female enterprise*: Advice and training shall be provided in order to further female participation in business. Ways shall be considered to render support systems for enterprise more accessible to women.

20. *Strengthening creative industries*: There shall be efforts to promote creative industries, with the active participation of areas outside the capital and in accordance with the resolution of the Science and Technology Policy Council that was passed on 2 June 2005.

21. *Promoting environmental work by local government*: Environmental efforts on the part of local governments shall be augmented with an eye to implementing Local Agenda 21, particularly in sparsely populated municipalities outside the capital area.

22. *Participating in the European Union's Northern Periphery Programme (NPP)*: Iceland shall remain an active participant in the European Union's Northern Periphery Programme.

23. *Promoting Nordic Atlantic Cooperation (NORA)*: Iceland shall continue working for the extension of NORA activities and encourage cooperating countries to provide funding for the committee's work.

The Minister of Industry and Commerce shall appoint a project management group to supervise the progress of the Regional Development Plan.