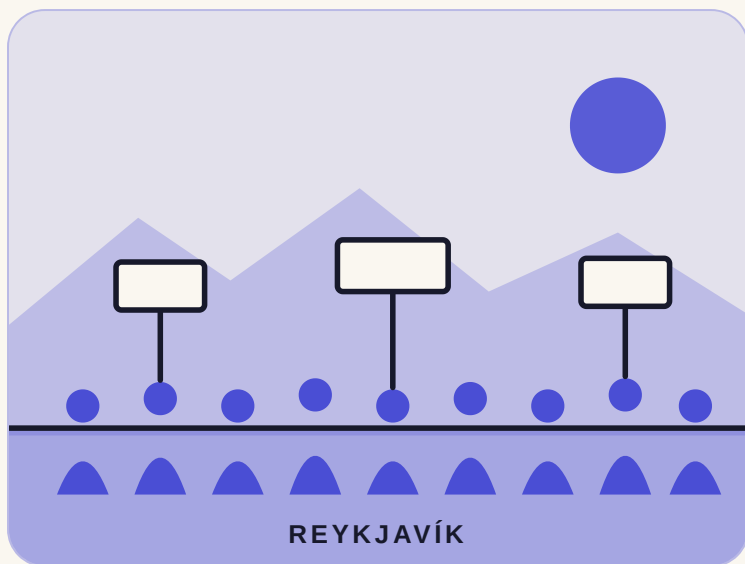




ICELAND

The day the women of Iceland stayed home

In 1975, nine in ten women in Iceland stopped work for a day. The country came to a halt.

WHERE Reykjavík

WHO The women of Iceland and the women's groups that planned the Women's Day Off

WHEN 1975 to 2025

4 min read

The story

On the morning of Friday, 24 October 1975, most women in Iceland did not go to work. They did not cook or clean either. Their children stayed with the men.

Iceland is a small island country in the North Atlantic. About 220,000 people lived there. Women had won the vote in 1915. But 60 years later, they still earned much less than men. Only 5 percent of the seats in parliament, the group that makes the country's laws, were theirs.

The United Nations had named 1975 International Women's Year. In June, women's groups met in the capital, Reykjavík, to plan how to mark it. One group, the Red Stockings, had wanted a women's strike since 1970. A strike is when workers stop work to make a point. They put the idea to the meeting.

Not a strike, a day off

Some women were afraid of the word. Strikes outside the trade unions were against the law. Then Valborg Bentsdóttir, from another women's group, spoke up.

Strike? Is that what you don't like? Why don't you then call it just a day off?

VALBORG BENTSDÓTTIR, QUOTED BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC,
2025

The new name worked. Women of every age and every party joined in. They sent postcards, knocked on doors and made phone calls. They sold posters and stickers. They wanted to show how much their work was worth.

90%

of women joined, say
the organizers

25,000

women at the rally in
Reykjavík

46%

of parliament seats
held by women now

The day the country stopped

On the day, nurseries and schools closed. So did big shops, theaters and fish factories. Fathers took their children to the office. By evening, easy-to-cook sausages had sold out. Some men called it the “Long Friday.”

More than 20 rallies took place around the country. The biggest was in the main square of Reykjavík. About 25,000 women came. The weather was mild and sunny. Many held signs that read “Equality at once.”

The women who prepared the newspaper Morgunblaðið for printing came in after midnight. That way the paper could put the day on its front page.

Not everything changed at once. One year later, Iceland passed an equal rights law. In 1980, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was elected president. She was the first woman in the world to win a public vote for that job. Today women hold 46 percent of the seats in parliament.

The day off has been held again seven times, most recently in 2025. Iceland is still not equal. One researcher says women there still do most of the housework.

How it unfolded

- **1915** Icelandic women win the right to vote.
- **1970** The Red Stockings begin to ask for a women's strike.
- **1975** About nine in ten women take a day off.
- **1980** Vigdís Finnbogadóttir is elected president.
- **2025** The day off is held again, 50 years on.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

Most protests ask people to do something new. This one asked women to stop doing what they always did. In one day, it showed how much of daily life rested on their work.

Changing one word also helped. Some women feared a strike. A “day off” let women of every party take part.

OUR TAKE

Doing nothing, all together, showed what their work was worth.

CHAPTER THREE

What we can learn

1 Choose words that let people in

Valborg Bentsdóttir's question turned "strike" into "day off." Women of every party could say yes.

Try this: Reword one request you make so more people can agree to it.

2 Let people own their part

Women's groups took the plan to their own members all over the country. One organizer said it was "their action."

Try this: Ask one person to take charge of one small part of a shared plan.

3 Show the value of unseen work

By stopping housework and care for one day, women showed how much they carried.

Try this: Name one unseen job you or someone close to you does, and say thank you.

4 Follow the big day with years of work

A law came in 1976 and a woman president in 1980. A researcher says one-day protests need years of work after them.

Try this: Pick one goal and write one small step for each month.

ONE THOUGHT TO TAKE AWAY

One day off showed what every day was worth.

Sources

National Geographic

[50 years ago, the women of Iceland took a day off—and inspired the world](#)

Kvennasögusafn (Women's History Archives, National and University Library of Iceland)

[Kvennafrídagurinn / The Women's Day Off](#)

UNRIC (UN Regional Information Centre for Western Europe)

[When Icelandic women brought the country to a stand-still](#)

Fact-check note: Sources agree on the date, the name and the main events. The 90 percent figure is the organizers' estimate (Women's History Archives, repeated by National Geographic and UNRIC), not a count. The rally is given as 25,000 women (National Geographic) or 25,000 people (Women's History Archives, an estimate), while UNRIC says 30,000. The story uses 25,000. National Geographic says the equal rights law came in 1976 and that Vigdís Finnbogadóttir's 1980 election followed; UNRIC says only that many believe the day off helped pave the way, so the story does not claim it caused the election. The 46 percent figure for women in parliament is National Geographic's, from 2025. The "Long Friday" name and the sold-out sausages are from National Geographic, as is Valborg Bentsdóttir's quote, which it takes from a 2023 Vox report. Lines marked "Our take" are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.