



# RÉTTUR AÐALSTEINSSON & PARTNERS

The Sixth Annual Report Progress- 2020

Implementing the United Nations Ten Global Compact Principles and Sustainable Development Goals.



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## ABOUT RÉTTUR

Réttur traces its origins back to 1969 when Ragnar Aðalsteinsson, one of Iceland's leading attorneys started his private practice in Reykjavík. Today, Ragnar's partners at Réttur include Attorneys Sigríður Rut Júlíusdóttir, Sigurður Örn Hilmarsson, Sigrún Ingibjörg Gísladóttir, Kári Hólmar Ragnarsson and Claudia Ashanie Wilson.

Réttur is internationally recognized for professionalism and the highest quality legal services and is ranked as a top-tier firm by The Legal 500, Chambers Europe 2020 and Chambers Global 2020.

In its 2020 report The Legal500 recognised Réttur as a Tier 1 firm in dispute resolution, where the reported stated: *"Réttur – Adalsteinsson & Partners' practice, which is praised for its 'outstanding quality of work and fast responses', is recognised for its expertise acting for individuals in civil and human rights cases relating to equality law and freedom of speech issues; the group is also instructed by companies in corporate law matters, bankruptcy proceedings and trademark claims. Ragnar Aðalsteinsson, whose experience includes landmark cases in the Supreme Court and the ECHR, recently represented Guðjón Skarphéðinsson in his successful high-profile acquittal, three decades after he was wrongfully convicted; the practice is also pursuing a damages claim against the State for wrongful imprisonment. Sigurður Örn Hilmarsson's expertise spans IP, constitutional law and human rights disputes."*

Réttur has also received national recognition on numerous and occasions as one of Iceland's leading companies in terms of its strength and stability, including from Creditinfo, the Icelandic Financial News (*Icel. Viðskiptablaðið*) and Keldan.

### Our Work

At Réttur we pride ourselves in employing highly qualified professionals who are dedicated to the rule of law and serving their community. Our attorneys have extensive experience in litigation and have worked on complex cases in numerous areas of law. The firm remains true to Ragnar Adalsteinsson's founding philosophy, which is to provide members of the public a fair chance to pursue their rights. We therefore work for companies and individuals alike.



Our main areas of expertise include human rights law, immigration and refugee law, litigation, copyright law, constitutional law, property rights law, insolvency law, tort law, competition law, company law and contract law.

For decades Réttur has worked in close cooperation with our highly knowledgeable counterparts in Scandinavia, the UK, Germany and the United States to provide our clients with appropriate advice regarding their legal situation in the respective country or region.

### Background Information

Company Name	Réttur- Aðalsteinsson & Partners ehf.
Address	Klapparstígur 25-27, 101 Reykjavík.
Telephone/website	+354-547-2000/ <a href="http://www.rettur.is">www.rettur.is</a>
Number of Employees	14

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Réttur has been a participant of the United Nations Global Compact since 2014.

Réttur is reporting according to the UN Global Compact “GC Active level” and describes herein how it implements the United Nations Ten Global Compact Principles and Sustainable Development Goals.




This document furthermore includes a letter from our CEO and Senior Partner, Ragnar Aðalsteinsson, Supreme Court Attorney, reaffirming our continued support for the United Nations Global Compact ten principles and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

*“Our world is experiencing a number of unprecedented crises and challenges simultaneously. Among others, a deadly virus, Covid-19, that has claimed the lives and livelihood of so many across the globe as well as the negative effects of climate change. More now than ever we recognise the importance of our contribution towards the development of a safer and more equitable world. We therefore remain steadfast in our commitment to achieving these goals.”*

We are pleased to reaffirm our commitment to the principles set out in the UN Global Compact framework.

Yours sincerely,



Ragnar Aðalsteinsson  
Senior Partner, CEO

Réttur - Aðalsteinsson & Partners

## INTRODUCTION

As a responsible global citizen, Réttur has long been committed to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable practices. During the last year, we remained dedicated and focused on our efforts to advance our sustainability initiatives and the implementation of United Nation's ten global compact principles, which are deeply embedded in our culture and business operations.

We are therefore pleased to contribute our fifth communication on progress which highlights some of the most positive steps taken during the reporting period in furtherance of our sustainability goals.

## ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND LABOUR RIGHTS 1-2

### A. Demonstrating strong support and respect for the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights

As Iceland's leading law firm in the practice of human rights law, we firmly support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights for all persons, legal and natural. Recognising that the foundation of our operation is guided by the respect for human rights, we continued throughout the reporting period to proudly demonstrate our support and demand for the highest human rights standards for all citizens. We furthermore remained non-complicit with any form of human rights abuse by utilizing every resource at our disposal.

Like the previous reporting period, we continued to improve our efforts to integrate and disseminate the global compact principles and its sustainability development goals into all areas of our operations and business strategy. In so doing, we placed significant focus on the enhancement of our best practices, in particular, how we contribute to the development of the best human rights standards in Iceland, regionally and internationally. Our main method of execution is employed through various forms of dispute resolution, both inside and outside the court room.

For each action, we measure the outcome, by identifying areas of success and areas for improvement.

## B. Activities and Measurement of Outcome

### a. Protecting Minority Rights in Iceland

#### - Applicants for International Protection and Refugee Rights-

On 11 April 2020, the Minister of Justice re-introduced parliamentary bill no. 1228, case 717



on the amendment of the Act on Foreigners' no 80/2016 to the Parliament. The bill which had been introduced previously but was not passed into law has the potential to violate human rights law, in particular the rights of applicants of international protection in Iceland.

Réttur in addition to other law firms and institutions, including the Red Cross and UNHCR, provided comments on the risk that the bill, if passed into law poses to international human rights law and standards. Réttur recognised the potential negative impact posed by the bill,



to the rights of applicants of international protection to fair trial within the meaning of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights cf. Article 70 of the Constitution of Iceland no. 33/1944. The bill proposes, inter alia, a new and narrow definition of the term “repeated application” as well as outlines the procedure under which such applications will be treated. Further to the above, the amendment poses a threat to the Icelandic government’s obligation to respect the non-refoulement principle, an obligation not to return a person to a country where they would be at risk of facing torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm. In addition to submitting comments on the bill, members of our team engaged in a number of public discussions about the danger of the amendment to recognised international human rights law as well as Iceland’s obligation thereto.

In 2019, Réttur was invited by the National Union of Icelandic Students and the newly founded Association for Student Refugees in Iceland (SRI) and Denmark at the launch of SRI to discuss the rights of applicants of international protection and refugees to access education in Iceland. Réttur considers this a welcomed and necessary initiative to improve the situation of applicants of international protection and refugees in Iceland.

- *Immigration, immigrant rights and non-discrimination*

On 7 November 2019, Réttur published the findings of its anticipated report on “The Equal treatment of immigrants on the labour market: Possibilities for employment within the public sector as qualified professionals.” Réttur received a grant from the Immigrant Fund



on 6 June 2018 to conduct the research. During the research period, we cooperated with various institutions in Iceland, including the Directorate of Health, Enic/Naric, Iðan education centre as well as the Directorate of Education, National Registry of Iceland, who

have all provided vital statistical information on the assessment procedure and recognition of immigrant education. The main finding of the report is that multiple hinderances prevent many immigrants with higher education from gaining employment within the Icelandic public sector. Among the multiple barriers are inadequate Icelandic language skills, which play a significant role. Notwithstanding, the report finds that many of the hinderances can be attributed to unfavourable laws, policies as well as practices. This finding is compatible with the 2015 MIPEX report on Iceland, which found that Iceland's integration policies create more obstacles than solutions for immigrants' participation in the society.

The findings of the research have been used as the basis for labour market integration plans set out in the new Action Plan on Immigrant Issues. The City of Reykjavik has also used the report to improve and implement new guidelines with respect to its recruitment process. In addition, the city of Reykjanes has also made commitments to use the report in further implementing their multicultural policies. Further, the report has been relied on by various institutions, including MIPEX for its 2020 report on Iceland, researchers in the field to complement their own research as well as by lecturers and professors during lectures at the university level.

In May 2020, Réttur received a second grant from the immigrant fund to conduct a research, entitled "Non- Discrimination and Equal Treatment: Immigrant Parents vs Child Protection Agencies in Iceland". The aim of the research is to examine whether parents of foreign origin, as parties to child protection cases experience discrimination during such proceedings both at the administrative and judicial level. It is expected that the research will be published in November of 2021.

- *Gender equality and gender-based violence: Symposiums, litigation and settlements*

As with the previous reporting periods, Réttur continued its efforts to combat gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence as well as tackle the impact on native and non-native victims. Our efforts involved litigation, settlements, engaging in public discourse as well as speaking engagements relating to gender-based discrimination and/or violence.

During the reporting period, Réttur participated in a number of forums and conferences concerning equality and gender-based discrimination and violence. This includes the first international Metoo Conference in September 2019 which was launched by the Prime Minister of Iceland, Katrín Jakobsdóttir. The conference adopted an intersectional approach to gender equality and gender-based violence, which represents a shift in discourse about how to talk about issues relating to gender equity.

Other seminars participated in by Réttur during the reporting period includes an open meeting in November 2019 by the Reykjavík City’s Violence Prevention Committee, Multicultural Council of Reykjavík, The Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASI), Women of Multicultural Ethnicity Network (W.O.M.E.N.) and the Icelandic Women’s Rights Association, on 7 March at the Her Voice Conference held on International Women’s Day 2020 and Annual Conference for the Young Professional Women in Iceland (UAK), in November 2020 at the Equality Balance conference by the Association of Women Business Leaders in Iceland (FKA). Following the passing of US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg in September 2020, a member of Réttur’s Team participated in a seminar in honour of the late Justice, discussing the status of women in the judicial system.

Most recently, Réttur participated in Rvk Feminist Film Festival’s No Woman Alone Conference which was held on 12 January 2021, where a Team



member engaged in discussions about the meaning of justice within the legal system for women who have been victims of sexual violence. Currently Réttur is representing a number of women before the European Court of Human Rights who have been victims of sexual

abuse and violence, whose cases were dismissed by prosecutors, as the cases were deemed unlikely to result in guilty verdicts.

- *Pro bono work and other voluntary contributions*



During the year 2019-2020, we have unfortunately once again observed a shift in the granting of legal aid to applicants of international protection by the Legal Aid Committee, with more applications being rejected than during the previous period. We are uncertain about what has caused this shift, but it indicated a return to the more conservative approach of generally not granting legal aid to such cases. This has resulted in new challenges and difficulty for applicants of international protection to whereas their inability to self-fund limits their access to court and thereby their ability to challenge a negative final decision at the judicial level. We will continue to monitor this progress and point out areas of improvement where necessary.

As a consequence, that not all cases are granted legal aid, Réttur has continued its work in defending the human rights of immigrants and asylum seekers against the Icelandic authority on a pro bono basis. We also offered more pro-bono services to applicants of international protection at the administrative level than the previous year. Although we have limited the number of cases that the firm takes on, the capacity of the cases accepted for pro bono representation and the precedence they set is quite significant.

We furthermore continued our pro-bono efforts in other fields. As with the previous year, a significant portion of these cases were in the field of criminal justice, where our team brought several tort cases for unlawful arrests, unlawful deportation cases and alleged police brutality. Another important area has been the right to privacy, family life and opinions, the team having taken on cases concerning the right to non-intervention of the government into these spheres of freedoms and freedom of expression.

Réttur continues its work on the class action suit brought on behalf of our clients and is supported by the Education and Counselling Centre for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Violence (Stígamót) against the State of Iceland before the European Court of Human Rights. Representation is done in part on a pro bono basis.

During the reporting period, we continued our work as members of various committees dealing with human rights issues, which include, re-election for a seat on the Representative Council of SOS- Children's Village Iceland. Another member of our team was elected as board member of the Icelandic Chapter of Amnesty International.

As with the previous years, our team members continued to garner recognition for their valuable contributions to the development of human rights in Iceland and have been invited on various occasions by local media and international media to give their views from a legal standpoint where public discourse concern matters of human rights law and constitutional law.

## **b. Continued cooperation with law schools in Iceland and contribution to education**

### **- Collaboration with Institutions for Higher Education in Iceland**



As part of Réttur's continued efforts in advancing sustainable development goal number 4 on the quality of education, our associates who are experts in human rights, civil law procedures, tort law and constitutional law, undertook various active roles as adjunct professors and guest lecturers and taught courses at law schools and universities, namely Bifröst University, University of Iceland, Reykjavik University and the University of Akureyri. In addition to previously taught courses in the aforementioned subject areas, our associates have been invited to participate in developing and teaching new courses in refugee and immigration law at the Reykjavík University as well as in social rights law at the University of Iceland. Our associates have also been invited to lecture in a new program introduced by the business department at the University of Iceland for spring 2021 on Diversity and Inclusion.

In addition to the foregoing, one of our associates was asked to continue tenure as a guest lecturer at the United Nations University for Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (UNU-GEST) as a lecturer for the spring 2020 and 2021 semesters. The lectures focus on Gender, Labor and Migration. Like so many activities and studies, due to the global pandemic a decision was made by the coordinators to postpone the 2021 program until 2022, due to restrictions on travel. Further, a member of our team was employed by the University of Iceland as a full-time lecturer in International law during the period.

Réttur has continued its support for the Project Girls for Girls in Iceland. The project is a mentorship program originating in Harvard for young girls between the ages 18 and 25. One of Réttur's associates is a mentor within the program and is also responsible for establishing the project in Iceland alongside the project manager in Harvard Kennedy School. At present the program has created a podcast with the aim to connect mentors, in particular young women in Iceland with their peers in Uganda.

- *Our internship program and other support to law students*

On the basis of our long-standing relationship with the schools of law of Reykjavik University and the University of Iceland Réttur has invited law students to intern at our firm as paralegals through internship programs. As with the previous years, our firm welcomed brilliant young legal minds from both law schools to the firm, with the aim of providing them with valuable legal training and experience in our main practice areas.

This period, we welcomed four students to intern at our firm for one month, three students from Reykjavík University and one from the University of Iceland.

In our previous report, we set a goal to expand our partnership with international law schools and invite law students from other countries to intern at our firm. We met that goal and during the period welcomed a law student from Poland, who interned at the firm for three months.

In addition to our internship program, Réttur lends further support to law students, for example through consultation and assistance with identifying research ideas for their final

thesis. Also, Réttur's associates regularly coach law students competing in both domestic and international law moot competitions.

### c. Improving labour rights – litigation efforts

In addition to the research conducted by Réttur on the equal access of immigrants with higher education to employment within the public sector, the firm represented individuals in suits brought against former employers for various violations of their labour rights, including wage theft and labor trafficking. One such case was brought by four Romanian nationals against an Icelandic company, where they alleged, inter alia, inhuman and degrading treatment and wage theft by an Icelandic company. The case was dismissed by the Reykjavík District Court in February 2021, mainly on the grounds that the defendant (Icelandic Company) has since become insolvent and that the owners of the company could not be held personally liable for the now insolvent company's violations. The plaintiffs have since been successful in receiving damages from the Icelandic Wage Guarantee Fund.

While the issue of labour trafficking is not a new concept, it has deservedly been receiving more attention here in Iceland for the last few years, both with respect to civil suits and criminal prosecution. However, Réttur is of the opinion that the justice system has much catching up to do in this area. This opinion is also supported by the US Department of State 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report for Iceland, as the Icelandic Government of Iceland does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. In addition, the US Department Report notes that the government maintains weak law enforcement efforts of these cases. The above case has brought much media attention to issues needing amendments, achieving a more sustainable justice system and in turn the development of strong institutions in Iceland.

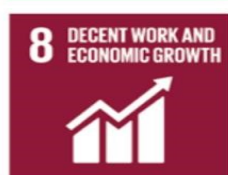
## LABOUR STANDARDS – PRINCIPLES 3-6

### A. Demonstrating our strong commitment to upholding high labour standard within and outside of our organisation

At Réttur - Aðalsteinsson & Partners, we remain steadfast in our belief that to ensure the highest labour standards within our community, we must start at home. We continue to strive to align our internal work policy with sustainable development goal numbers 3 and 8, which call for good health and well-being as well as decent work and economic growth. Our goals remain unchanged, i.e., to capitalize on our strengths, to identify areas for improvement, and to guarantee an equitable and respectful working environment for all our employees. It is our continued belief that maintaining the highest labour standards provides our company with new opportunities and responsibilities that we continue to readily explore.

Although we are not faced with this challenge within our own organisation, Réttur is committed to the fight to eliminate all forms of forced and compulsory labor and have engaged in litigations on behalf of our clients who have been victims of such violations, as described in section C of this report. The same applies with respect to the effective abolition of child labour.

### B. Activities and Measurement of Outcome



- [Internal dialogue and employee participation in developing internal labour standards](#)

As a small company, teamwork, a good, stable and safe work environment is of utmost importance to us. Essential to our objective to guarantee for our employees the highest labour standards, in line with sustainable development goal number 3, we continue to promote



teamwork, good health and wellness, welcome diversity among our employees and hold equality as well as the respect for family life at a high standard. We recognize the importance of having a diverse and inclusive work force which is reflected in the staff population.

Currently our workforce is comprised of 14 employees, including two paralegals and one intern. Our staff comes from different backgrounds, ages and ethnicities.

We regularly consult with our employees about how to best improve our office culture and have recently adopted a handbook based on input and insights provided by our employees.

During the reporting period, we have taken even further steps on a number of issues most important to our employees, in an effort to continue the highest compliance with current labour laws and policies aimed at non-violation of our employees' rights.

- *Supporting and encouraging health and wellness among our employees*

Réttur continues to encourage healthy life choices by our employees, with a focus on both good mental and physical health. In support of that initiative, we offer partial reimbursement of gym memberships of our employees' choice. In addition, in 2017 Réttur partnered with a neighbouring gym to provide for our employees' free access to its facilities. As part of our wellness initiative, we provide each employee access to massage therapy at least once a month.

We furthermore support and encourage our staff to take active part in sport events and exercises, such as cycletrons, marathons etc. Réttur recently participated in Lífshlaupið, which is a health- and motivational project by the Icelandic Sports and Olympics Association, where all Icelanders are encouraged to examine their daily exercise and make an effort to increase physical activities, with a focus of a minimum of 30 minutes daily exercise.

We encourage and support our employees' extra-curricular activities aimed at improving health and wellness for themselves and for the benefit of the community at large. In this context it is noted that a member of our team was in summer 2020 was elected as a board member to the Icelandic Table Tennis Development Board, whose role is to encourage sport participation in minority groups with special focus on girls, elderly citizens, immigrants and rural areas.

Réttur continues to recognise its responsibility to ensure a healthy working environment for all members of staff and will continue to take the necessary steps in adherence of that responsibility.

- *Incentives and freedom of association*

Réttur guarantees all employees' rights to compulsory and non-compulsory benefits which include, paid parental leave, paid leisure, paid scheduled family-oriented leisure activities, year-end bonuses as well as annual appreciation items.

Employees are regularly encouraged to write academic papers and articles for publishing in law journals and are provided with incentives for doing so.

Further, we remain committed to ensuring that all our employees have the right to freely join associations and undertake collective bargaining.

- *Respect for family life*

In our day-to-day operation Réttur places great emphasis on the respect for our employees' family life. The coronavirus pandemic has caused an unprecedented strain on families around the globe, including for our employees, who must balance work and family commitments during these unprecedented times.

Due to Réttur's longstanding policy on remote work due to family commitment, our employees were well equipped to adjust work commitments to that of their family life.

- *Opportunities*

As mentioned in our previous report, while most of our practices are already compatible with various sustainable development goals, we recognise that we need to improve in some areas, such as our partnership goals. We pledge in our last report to continue to improve on these initiatives and further integrate the United Nation Sustainable Standards into our everyday operations.

We are pleased to report that we have honoured that commitment to the extent possible in light of our limitations due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As reported about, our employees have made individual commitments through various programs, such as the *For Girls Project* with the newly created mentorship podcast aimed at connecting young Ugandan women with their peers in Iceland, as well as sitting on the board of the Icelandic Chapter of Amnesty International.

## ENVIRONMENT – PRINCIPLES 7-9

### A. Undertaking initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility

At Réttur we recognize that adopting a maintaining an environmentally responsible approach to our operations is vital for our sustainability and to that of the community at large. We continue to strive to make environmentally responsible improvements to our everyday operation and management in an effort to reduce our environmental impact.

During the reporting period, we continued to increase and implement our best practices in all areas of our operation, including by adopting new enforcement measures, encouraging environmentally responsible practices not only by our employees but also our clients.

### B. Our activities and measurement outcome

#### - Our “Green Office” policy

In 2018 Réttur adopted an internal policy under our “green our office” agenda, which is a more comprehensive environmental policy, aimed at increasing eco-friendly initiatives within the office and simultaneously reducing our operational footprint. The policy was fully implemented in 2019 as we move closer to our sustainability initiatives on climate change and responsible consumption.



We are pleased to report that we have significantly reduced various non-environmentally sustainable products and habits during the period. Remote work due to the covid-19 pandemic has also affected in a positive way the usage of various office supplies and decreased waste and disposal.



During the period we continued to increase our green purchasing of office supplies and have also done so with respect to other operational products. At present we only use eco-friendly paper provided by eco-friendly suppliers and will increase those efforts under our green office agenda.

As reported in the last period, we invested in online filing systems in an effort to significantly reduce the use of paper. During the period we have upgraded our system and in April 2020 incorporated an even more environmentally friendly management and filing system.

We continue to discourage printing by our employees unless strictly necessary and utilized double-sided printing to a larger extent. In instances where printing is necessary, employees must use the *calibri light font*, which results in a decrease of print ink usage.

During the period we have increased drastically our recycling efforts and have invested in a much larger disposable system, with added recycling categories.

- *Supporting and encouraging environmentally friendly practices by employees and clients*

While the Covid-19 pandemic has created various unprecedented challenges for our company and others, we also recognized some of the opportunities it presented and the positive impact thereof to our initiatives aimed at environmental responsibility. Among these are our interactions with our clients. Although Iceland is at present among countries with the lowest Covid-19 positive cases, we've drastically reduced in-person meetings and opted to a greater

extent for online meetings. This results in reduced travel to our offices and in turn the negative environmental impact of such travels.

During the period, we also continued to encourage our employees to adopt environmentally responsible means of travelling to work. We are pleased to report that the majority of our employees now utilize environmentally friendly methods of commute for travel to work, including electronic bikes, public transportation (which is partially reimbursed by the company) walking etc.

Our employees are furthermore encouraged to continue to employ more sustainable consumption and production practices both within and outside the office. Such practices include, growing own vegetables in community gardens, recycling, taking steps to raise awareness about food waste and its reduction, choosing local food products to a larger extent as well as participating in environmentally friendly community projects organised by residents.

#### ANTI-CORRUPTION – PRINCIPLE 10

##### **Working against all forms of corruption, including extortion and bribery**

As with the previous years, we remain dedicated to our commitment to work against all forms of corruption. At Réttur Aðalsteinsson & Partners, we have a zero-tolerance policy for any form of corruption, which applies in our own organisation, to our stakeholders as well as our clients. Réttur has a strict know your client policy in line with current anti-money laundering legislation and adheres with all relevant laws in its interaction with current and potential clients.

Recognizing our position within the community, as officers of the court who are held to a high legal and ethical standard, we continue to strive to provide the best quality legal services to our clients in full compliance with all applicable laws, including but not limited to laws on anti-corruption and the Attorney's Code of Ethics.