

Waste prevention country profile

Iceland

February 2025



European Environment Agency



Country profile: Iceland

General information

Name of the country/ region	Iceland
Geographical coverage of the waste prevention programme (national/ regional)	National
Type of programme (stand alone or integrated into waste management plan or into the circular economy strategy)	Current programme is integrated. Revision of the programme is in progress and a new national programme on waste prevention will be launched in 2025.
Title of programme and link to programme	Current programme: Saman gegn sóun, included in „Í átt að hringrásarhagkerfi „ (Towards a circular economy) https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/02-Rit--skyrslur-og-skrar/Stefna%20um%20me%C3%B0h%C3%B6ndlun%20%C3%BAngangs%202021-2032%20090621.pdf
Duration of programme	New programme is in progress. 2016 until 2027. The new programme will replace the old one and will have duration from 2025-2036.
Language	Icelandic
Contact person in the country/region	Þorbjörg Sandra Bakke, head of circular economy unit at Umhverfis- og orkustofnun, Icelandic Environment and Energy Agency.
Development process of the programme/ revision	The programme is under revision, new programme will be published in late 2025.
Foreseen budget for implementation of the programme	Cost estimates for the new programme are still in evaluation.

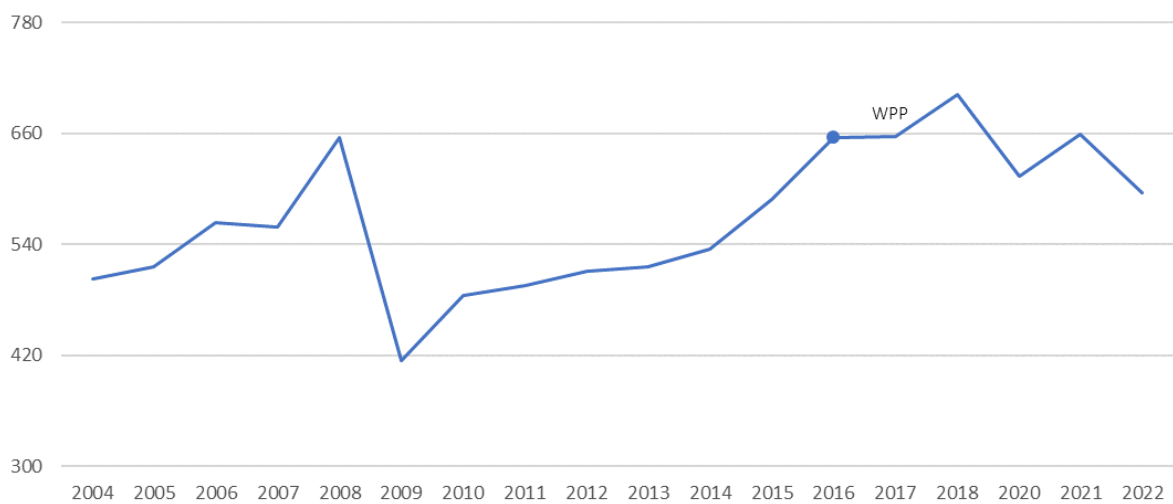
WASTE GENERATION

The following figures illustrate the progress towards waste prevention and decoupling of waste generation from economic growth in Iceland:

Municipal solid waste (MSW):

The generation of municipal waste per capita (Figure 1) has fluctuated between 503 and 702 kg/capita per year during the period 2004–2022. Overall, municipal waste generation in 2022 was 595 kg/capita, which is above the European average (513 kg/capita in 2022)¹. Iceland's waste prevention programme came into force in 2016, and the year after, municipal waste generation stabilized. However, waste generation increased again in 2018, followed by a dip connected to the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, and has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1 Municipal waste generation in Iceland (kg per capita), 2004-2022



Source: Eurostat [ENV_WASMUN].

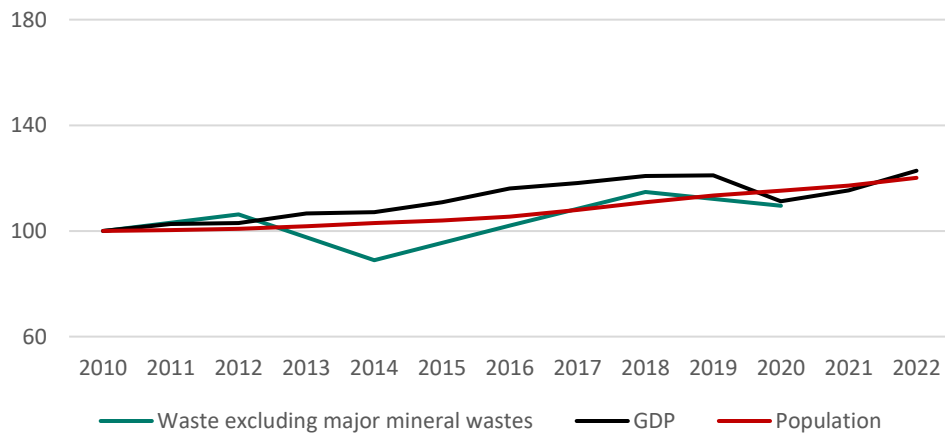
¹ Based on data collected from Eurostat in December 2024.

Total waste (excluding major mineral waste)

Iceland's waste generation (excluding major mineral wastes) increased by approximately 10% in absolute terms but decreased by 9 % per capita from 2010 to 2020 (Figure 2). This suggests that the increase in total waste in absolute terms may largely be attributed to population growth, which rose steadily by 15% during the same period. A decline in waste generation observed in 2020 coincides with a reduction in GDP, likely influenced by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

No clear relationship between GDP and waste generation can be identified. While GDP steadily increased until the onset of COVID-19, total waste per capita showed fluctuations. For instance, in 2012, waste per capita grew faster than GDP, in 2010 increased much less GDP, whereas in remaining other years, it declined compared to 2010. These inconsistencies make it challenging to draw solid conclusions about decoupling waste generation from economic growth.

Figure 2 Generation of waste (excluding major mineral wastes), population and economic development, 2010-2022



Source: Eurostat [ENV_WASGEN, NAMA_10_PC, DEMO_GIND].

Note: Waste generation data for odd years are interpolated.

WASTE PREVENTION PROGRAMME

Objectives and priorities

1. Waste prevention objectives of the Programme - quantitative objectives (waste reduction) - qualitative objectives (reduction of hazardous substances/ environmental impacts)	The general goals of the policy are to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduce waste generation and greenhouse gas emissions.• improve the utilization of resources, with an emphasis on innovation.• reduce the use of raw materials while reducing the environmental impact.• reduce the distribution of substances that are harmful to health and the environment. Action plans with associated targets will be developed for each key sector during the programme period 2016-2027.
2. Sectors covered	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• food processing• industry (mineral production)• retail• households• food services• packaging• construction
3. Priority waste types	Categories that will be a priority for two years at a time: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food waste (2016-2017)• plastic (2018-2019)• textiles (2020-2021)• electronics (2022-2023)• construction (2024-2025)• paper (2026-2027) And throughout the whole programme (2016-2027): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• waste from aluminium and silicon production;• packaging for beverages;• meat and fish processing waste
4. Target groups	The programme focusses on measures by public institutions, the industry, service industry and households.

Targets, indicators and monitoring

1.	Indicators used to monitor progress	Current indicators include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• food and food processing waste generation• plastic packaging waste• textiles and footwear waste• beverage packages• waste generation in aluminium and silicon metal production
2.	Quantitative targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduce food waste by 30% by 2025 in each part of the food supply chain and• reduce food waste by 50% in 2030 in each part of the chain, compared to the level 2021• Reducing the proportion of fish waste from fish catch processed in Iceland to 0.18%• Percentage of slaughter waste from meat production in Iceland max 30%• the amount of plastic packaging not to exceed 30 kg / inhabitant per year• the number of carrier plastic bags should not exceed 40 bags / inhabitant per year, in 2025• the amount of textiles and footwear not to exceed 10 kg / inhabitant per year• the number of returnable beverage packaging per capita not to exceed 400 per year by 2027.• waste intensity in the total production of aluminium and silicon minerals not to exceed 14%
3.	Monitoring mechanism of the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Selected key waste fractions are monitored annually• The follow-up of the progress include annual updates of indicators as well as activity/action plans on each topic.
4.	Evaluation of the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The implementation of the programme is planned to be evaluated and revised in 2022-2023.

Prevention measures

Implemented prevention measures according to Article 9	The Icelandic waste prevention programme will include action plans for a number of key sectors. E.g. in 2020 the action plan for plastic was approved, the action plan for food waste was published in 2021 and the action plan for textiles is expected to be published in 2023.
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The waste prevention programme includes the following measures that are proposed to avoid waste generation (Chapter 1.5):

Table 1: Specific waste prevention measures structured according to Art 9 WFD

Promote and support sustainable consumption models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Icelandic government introduced its first policy promoting green procurement in 2003 and it was updated 2013. It includes a common platform supporting contracting authorities in sustainable procurement. Contracting authorities can here find environmental requirements for all kinds of procurement² Awareness raising and information are published on the Environment agency's website Saman gegn sóun (Together against waste), at various promotional events and meetings and in the media.
Encourage the design, manufacturing and use of products that are resource-efficient, durable (including in terms of life span and absence of planned obsolescence), reparable, re-usable and upgradable .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nordic Swan Ecolabel the official Ecolabel of the Nordic countries, Nordic Swan Eco label imposes stringent requirements on e.g. materials, services and construction. The Nordic Swan Ecolabel's requirements have been introduced in public procurement, especially in the field of printing and cleaning services. Workshop and Hackathon on extended lifespans and sustainable production of textiles (August 2020)³ and a hackathon on plastics as well (September 2019)⁴. Bláskelin, an award for excellent plastic-free solutions, is awarded annually by the Minister of the Environment. All members of society can be nominated; companies, institutions, individuals etc.
Target products containing critical raw materials to prevent that those materials become waste.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the waste prevention plan, electronics will be the priority waste streams 2022-2023. It will include among others, actions to support reuse of electrical appliances.

² Sigurðardóttir D. 2017. Sustainable Public Procurement in Iceland. EPPL Vol. 12, No. 3 . p. 358 – 364. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26695471.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Afd5e9abecbca3faf2b52f080afee9acc>
[Billiards | Together against waste \(samangegnoun.is\)](https://samangegnoun.is/)³

⁴ <https://samangegnoun.is/plastathon/>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A processing fee has recently been put on EEE being put on the market.
Encourage the re-use of products and the setting up of systems promoting repair and re-use activities , including in particular for electrical and electronic equipment, textiles and furniture, as well as packaging and construction materials and products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Environmental Agency and Ministry of Environment aim to shortly start the work on monitoring and support actions for reuse • Awareness raising through Saman gegn sóun
Encourage, as appropriate and without prejudice to intellectual property rights , the availability of spare parts, instruction manuals, technical information , or other instruments, equipment or software enabling the repair and re-use of products without compromising their quality and safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising through Saman gegn sóun • Cooperation with NGOs and others on repair coffee and support.
Reduce waste generation in processes related to industrial production, extraction of minerals, manufacturing, construction and demolition, taking into account best available techniques .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public authorities will support the increased implementation of cost accounting systems for waste generation in companies in order to set economic incentives for resource efficient production processes. • The ecolabel Nordic Swan has been used label „Nachhaltiges Bauen“ (sustainable construction) will be supported in order to set incentives for prevention of construction and demolition waste. • FSRE (the government construction contracting agency) uses an eco-friendly strategy in its invitations to tender. FSRE handles all major building procurements for the Icelandic State in cooperation with Ríkiskaup. FSRE has shown initiative by incorporating the Breeam assessment in all major procurements, which is one of the world’s leading sustainability assessment method for master planning projects, infrastructure and buildings. Today 10% of FSRE contracts are Breeam certified.⁵
Reduce the generation of food waste in primary production, in processing and manufacturing, in retail and other distribution of food, in restaurants and food services as well as in households as a contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to reduce by 50 % per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and to reduce food losses along production and supply chains by 2030.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national strategy on food waste prevention will be implemented and further developed.

⁵ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26695471.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Afd5e9abecbca3faf2b52f080afee9acc>

<p>Encourage food donation and other redistribution for human consumption, prioritising human use over animal feed and the reprocessing into non-food products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options to support food donations will be developed in a specific working group with the federal states A study on legal options to support food donations will be prepared. Legal risks and liabilities for food donations will be minimized wherever possible.
<p>Promote the reduction of the content of hazardous substances in materials and products, without prejudice to harmonised legal requirements concerning those materials and products laid down at Union level, and ensure that any supplier of an article as defined in point 33 of Article 3 of Regulation (EC) No. 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council provides the information pursuant to article 33(1) of that regulation to the European Chemicals Agency as from 5 January 2021.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative projects with merchants are planned on increasing the market share of clothing bearing eco-labels production or low content of harmful substances, e.g. The Swan, GOTS22 and Confidence in Textiles. Awareness raising in co-operation with the chemical team at the Icelandic EPA
<p>Reduce the generation of waste, in particular waste that is not suitable for preparing for re-use or recycling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The waste prevention programme includes action plans for waste prevention and reduction of harmful substances in construction 2024-2025 Targets are set to decrease the waste intensity of aluminium and silicon mineral production.
<p>Identify products that are the main sources of littering, notably in natural and marine environments, and take appropriate measures to prevent and reduce litter from such products, where Member States decide to implement this obligation through market restrictions, they shall ensure that such restrictions are proportionate and non-discriminatory.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Icelandic Government Recycling Fund, which was established in 2003 and uses economic incentives to increase recycling especially of products prone to end up as marine litter such as fishing gears. The fund charges manufacturers and importers of e.g. fishing gears for a fee, which is used for enhancing recycling. This incentivises Icelandic fishermen and fishing companies to return nets and ropes without having to pay a recycling fee An action plan to reduce the use of plastic bags is in place. Stringent measures such as levy or a ban on plastic bags will be taken if statistics shows that set goals of the action plan and the agreement have not been achieved. The EU single use plastics directive has been implemented
<p>Aim to halt the generation of marine litter as a contribution towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iceland has committed to reduce marine litter in its waters over the next three years. The aim is to reduce the use and increase recycling and appropriate treatment of all plastics, especially single-use items and used fishing gear. Focus will be on the prevention of marine litter entering the ocean from land-based and sea-based sources. Monitoring marine litter on Iceland's coastline will be strengthened, as the basis for meaningful action and addressing the main sources of litter.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action plan to reduce the use of plastic bags is in place. Stringent measures such as levy or a ban on plastic bags will be taken if statistics shows that set goals of the action plan and the agreement have not been achieved. • The Government and the fishing industry will continue to cooperate on the basis of an existing voluntary agreement on recovery and recycling of fishing nets made from plastic, overseen by the Icelandic Recycling Fund. Current recovery rate of fishing nets is close to 90%, but fees can be added to the price of fishing nets in case of non-compliance.
<p>Develop and support information campaigns to raise awareness about waste prevention and littering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The web site www.samangeignsoun.is gives wide information on waste prevention and waste prevention projects on key waste fractions; food waste, textiles and plastic, for the public, companies and public authorities. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on food waste prevention to schools • Information on sustainable plastic use for companies by sector • Information on sustainable textile use for the public

FOOD WASTE PREVENTION

Food waste generation

In 2016, households wasted 23 kg/capita of usable food. The equivalent number for 2019 was 20 kg/capita and year. Figures for the other parts of the value chain (primary production, food processing, retail, catering and other food services) are not yet available. The plan is to conduct a large survey for the whole food chain fall 2021 and following that, setting down a methodology for estimating food waste between those bigger surveys according to methodology set down by the EU.⁶

Measures to prevent food waste

In the action plan for reducing food waste, published 25th Aug 2021, the responsible working group defines 24 actions. These actions are divided between the public and private sector. The action plan includes actions focusing on monitoring, education and awareness, food donations, efficient use of by-products etc. The government is responsible for 14 actions and 10 operations are in the hands of the business sector. Among the proposed measures for the government are better support to innovation, promotion of education and training on food waste, encouraging economical means of food waste prevention, revised regulation and regular monitoring of food waste. Actions for the business sector include also awareness raising, better Synchronization of supply and demand in retail; organising food trucks for leftover food and enhanced open markets for by-products. Activities following the action plan have partly commenced even if the plan has not officially been approved by the authorities.

⁶ Stjórnarráð Island 2021. Saman gegn soun. Viðauki við almenna stefnu um úrgangsförvarnir 2016 - 2027 2. útg., mars 2021 Together against waste. Annex to the general policy on waste prevention 2016 - 2027 available at <https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/02-Rit--skyrslur-og-skrar/Saman%20gegn%20s%20C3%B3un%20-%20%20C3%BA%20vi%20C3%B0auka%20mars%202021.pdf>

The working group includes representatives from Matís, the Consumer Federation, the Federation of Icelandic Municipalities, the Association of Employers, the Environment Agency, environmental organisations, the Association of Trade Unions, the Farmers' Association of Iceland, the National Association of Icelandic Students, the Federation of Icelandic Graduate Students, the Student Union of Iceland and the Young Environmentalists Association.

REUSE OF PRODUCTS

Data

Iceland has not reported any data for reuse of textiles, furniture, electrical and electronic equipment and construction and building materials according to Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/19 for the year 2021 by the reporting deadline (EEA, 2024).

Measures to support reuse

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning aim to start its work on supporting reuse following the monitoring requirement of the EU. In the current programme (Towards circular economy, chapter “Greener textiles”, supporting reuse of textiles is one of the priorities 2020-2021.

The municipality waste organisation for the capital area Sopra (www.sorpa.is) collects textiles for reuse. Textile reuse is organised by the Red Cross. Clothes are then sorted by volunteers, and given to those in need, both in Iceland and overseas. Textiles not suitable for reuse are recycled and used to manufacture rags and blankets, for example. Also Hertex, a thrift store operated by the Salvation Army, organises clothing collection for reuse. It has clothing containers near selected Krónan grocery stores. Sopra also collects other reusable items at their recycling centers. Reusable items go to Góði hirðirinn, SORPA’s thrift store while all profits from sales go to aid and charitable work.⁷

Best practice examples

Hackaton for solutions that counter textile waste.

The Environmental Agency arranged a two-day concept workshop and hackathon, where participants learned about the textile industry's problems and subsequently developed solutions that counter textile waste. The main challenges put out were:

- How to get the public to reduce consumption and extend the lifespan of their own textiles?
- How to increase public participation in textile recycling?
- How to promote sustainability in textile production?
- How to ensure better and more efficient recycling so value is not lost?

The winning solution was called The Savings Bank (Spjarasafnið) and is a kind of Airbnb for clothing. The Savings Bank is a platform where users can rent out and borrow garments in the short term and when appropriate.

Hackaton for solutions that counter plastic use and plastic waste.

The Environmental Agency arranged a two-day concept workshop and hackathon, where participants learned about plastics and the problems associated with it and subsequently developed solutions that counter plastic waste. The main challenges put out were:

- How to reduce plastic waste?
- How to increase plastic recycling?
- How to prevent plastic pollution?

⁷ <https://www.sorpa.is/en/households/nyttjahlutir>

The winning solution was called Beljur í búð (e. Cows in the store). The idea is to install self-service machines for dairy products in stores so that the buyer can pump the product himself into reusable packaging.

Bláskelin (e. The Mussel) – reward for excellent plastic free solutions

The blue shell is an award that is given to a company, organization, individual or other for excellent solutions that promote less plastic use and plastic waste in society.

The awards are a part of the actions of the Minister of Environment to reduce the negative effects of plastic use. It is intended to highlight what is done well and encourage innovation. A special allocation committee selects the awardees, which is made up of representatives from the Association of Industry, Young Environmentalists, Waste, the Ministry of University, Industry and Innovation and the Environment Agency.

The following factors are taken into account when selecting award winners:

- the innovative value of the relevant solution
- the solution contributes to the circular economy
- what is the general contribution of the solution to environmental issues
- which plastic product is being avoided with the solution
- the solution has the potential to enter general use

Those who have been awarded with the Bláskel are Segull 67 brewery, Matarbúðin Nándin - plastic-free shop, Pure North Recycling and Marea - biotechnology company.

Advertising campaign addressing christmas consumption

Advertising campaign in November and December 2022 to tackle unnecessary consumption on discount days and raise awareness of environmentally friendly Christmas gifts. The campaign was given the slogan: „The best gifts always have 100% discount“, see: <https://samangegnsoun.is/gjafirsemgefa/>

Information for canteens on food waste

The projects that have perhaps had the most contact with food waste in the last year are on the one hand Green steps in government operations and on the other hand The Swan. Last year, Green Steps published guidelines for canteens on packaging and food waste, along with a poster with key tips. Through Green Steps, it is now mandatory for government agencies to measure food waste, and a template was published to keep track of these measurements. Last year, the Swan published updated standards for hotels and other accommodations on the one hand, and for restaurant operations on the other. There are now considerably stricter requirements for measures to prevent food waste. This includes, among other things, a requirement for a responsible person, regular measurements, analysis of the reasons for food waste and an action plan to respond, education for guests and education and training of staff. See requirement O20 in the reference document for restaurant operations.

Clothing exchange markets

During the EWWR (the European week for waste reduction), the Environment Agency encouraged all local authorities and workplaces in the country to set up clothing exchange markets and prepared guidelines on the subject.

Guidelines for the responsible use of plastic

On the webpage [Plast í atvinnulífinu | Saman gegn sóun](#) Iceland have published sector specific guidelines for businesses on how to reduce unnecessary plastic use, what types of plastic they should preferably use and how to dispose of them properly – all with the aim of creating a circular economy for plastics.

Textíll og jafnrétti (e. textiles and equality)

Project with the aim to point out how the burden of overuse of textiles and focus on fast fashion fall not only on nature but also females more than males all through the supply chain: From manufacturing, to retail and use. Including bringing to light the mental load regarding the textile use of families. The work was based on international literature and research material. We also did a national survey in Iceland with a questionnaire on textile use, reuse, recycling etc. Results were communicated through podcast participation, social media coverage and podcast, see: [Textíll og jafnrétti | Saman gegn sóun](#) /.

Links to circular economy

Waste prevention is an integral part of the comprehensive transformation towards a circular economy. It reduces the input of natural resources into the economy as well as the necessary efforts to collect and recycle waste.

Approaches for improving circularity are often highly interlinked with successful waste prevention. The following table shows which circular strategies are explicitly integrated into Iceland's waste prevention programme.

Topic	Addressed in the programme	Comments
Eco-design	Yes	Textiles
Repair, refurbishment and remanufacture	(No) Yes	The work on value retention processes will start in the near future.
Recycling	Yes	E.g. recycling of e.g. collected used textiles that are not suitable for reuse. Incentives to fishermen to return used fishing gears for recycling
Economic incentives and finance	Yes	Rewards for food donations such as tax reduction
Circular business models	Yes	E.g. by creating stronger links between supply and demand in the food chain
Eco-innovation	Yes	The food waste prevention action plan proposes governmental support to innovation
Governance, skills and knowledge	N/A	