

The public health impact of public bodies refocusing on waste reduction and reuse in Wales

“By 2050, Wales will be a country which instinctively thinks and plans to **use as few resources as possible**, **keeps those resources in use for as long as possible** and then **finds new uses for these resources** at the end of their first useful life.”¹



What is a Circular Economy?

The cycling of all resources, both biological (biodegradable) and technical (not biodegradable). Gives tools to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, while addressing social needs. Gives us the power to grow prosperity, jobs, and resilience while cutting greenhouse gas emissions, waste, and pollution².

Who is most impacted by Circular Economy waste strategies?

 Whole Population ⊕ ⊗	 Employees of Public Bodies ⊕ ⊗	 Low-Mid Level Occupations ⊕ ⊗	 Disadvantaged / Poor Areas ⊕ ⊗
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Which determinants of health & well-being are most affected by Circular Economy waste strategies?

 Mental Health & Wellbeing ⊕ ⊗	 Living & Environmental Conditions ⊕ ⊗	 Economical Conditions ⊕ ⊗	 Macro-economic, environmental & sustainability ⊕ ⊗
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Key
 ⊕ Positive impact
 ⊗ Negative impact
 ⊕ ⊗ Mixed positive & negative impact

What is waste?

“any substance or object which the holder discards or intends or is required to discard...”³

Managing Waste in Wales

The total amount of local authority municipal waste generated in Wales **decreased by 2.5%** from 1,590 thousand tonnes to 1,550 thousand tonnes between 2016/17 and 2017/18⁴.

The total amount of municipal waste (kilogram per capita) created in Wales is higher than in England and Scotland⁵

Wales is a global leader in recycling rates of municipal waste (64%), second only to Germany (66%)⁵.

How can we benefit from using Reduce, Reuse, Recycle/Circular Economy approach

 Improved air quality	 Change consumer behaviours	 Diet improvements	 Reducing waste	 Reducing health inequalities	 Reducing food waste	 Improved mental health & well-being	 Upskilling workers
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¹(Welsh Government, 2021a: p.11) ²Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019b. ³The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 (SI: 2011/988), 2011). ⁴(Welsh Government, 2017b). ⁵(Welsh Government, 2018a) ⁵(Economia and European Environmental Bureau, 2017)

Employment in the Waste Management Sector in Wales

Over **4,180 full time equivalent posts** in municipal and waste processing services³

18.3% employed in process plant, machinery operative, and elementary occupations⁷

The **water, sewerage and waste management sector** employs **13,000 people**⁷

Around **two thirds** of people employed in **repair activities** are **skilled workers** e.g. motor repairs⁸

Only **38.8%** of adults aged 16-64 years have a **qualification level of NVQ4 and above**⁹.

Key Positive impact Negative impact Mixed positive & negative impact

Impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on Circular Economy approaches

Mental Health & Well-Being

Waste Disposal & Recycling

Specific Waste Streams

Waste Management Sector

Circular Economy

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Planetary Health

Reduce & Reuse Outlets including 3rd sector

Waste Services

Findings

1. A need to ensure **positive and negative impacts, unintended consequences, and opportunities are understood** including those arising during a projected period of transition to a Circular Economy.
2. Achieving zero waste requires an **evolution in thinking about how resources are used** - from a linear to a circular approach.
3. Negative impacts are assessed to be felt in the **short term but with lower intensity**, paving the way for **more intense long-term positive impacts**.
4. In contrast to reduce, reuse and recycle approaches generally, many of the impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic were **immediate and impacted in the short-term**.

Opportunities



Potential public health co-benefits to be gained from prioritising reduce and reuse policies:

- **To reduce long-standing inequalities** (for example create skilled jobs and fair work)
- **To deliver the goal of zero waste by 2050** and a Circular Economy in Wales
- **For change in the manufacturing sector** and for public bodies and industry to collaborate to influence change

Potential Areas for Action



- **Use of Health impact Assessment** when developing Circular Economy policies and interventions
- **Supporting community action and initiatives** for reduction and reuse of resources
- **Prioritising waste reduction** towards zero waste
- **Reducing all energy consumption**
- **Reducing plastic use and plastic waste**
- **Reducing waste through sustainable procurement**
- **Reducing food waste**
- **Increasing levels of reuse**
- Continuing to **support recycling**
- **Collaborative action** across all sectors and public bodies to consider **the health and well-being impacts and any inequalities**
- **Public bodies leading by example** towards zero waste and a Circular Economy ('Be the Change')

⁶(Welsh Government, 2017b). ⁷(Office for National Statistics, 2019b) ⁸(Office for National Statistics 2019c) ⁹(Office for National Statistics, 2021a)