



**World Health Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**



## **Participatory approaches to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals: ICELAND**

Youth, health-promoting communities and partnerships



## Key messages

Iceland's experience in developing participatory approaches towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1) underlines the importance of the following.

- **Involving young people is important to the goal of leaving no one behind.**

The opinions of children and young people are valuable but often unheard. Iceland is using participatory approaches to involving this group in planning action to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda and achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1), and ensure that the needs of future generations are taken into account.

- **Creating health-promoting communities facilitates the implementation of measures towards achievement of the SDGs at both the national and municipal levels.**

Based on collaboration among key stakeholders across all sectors and levels of government, this mechanism ensures that all of society is considered in planning action to achieve the SDGs (1).

- **Strategically raising awareness about the SDGs at all levels of society works.**

Youth in Iceland today are more conscious about the environment than they were in past decades.

Health promotion is also on people's minds  
– 80% of the population is part of a health-promoting community (HPC).

- **The effective translation of knowledge into action is critical in implementing programme and policy changes.**

This underlines the importance of health indicators to health-promotion efforts at the community level, such as those of the Icelandic HPC programme.



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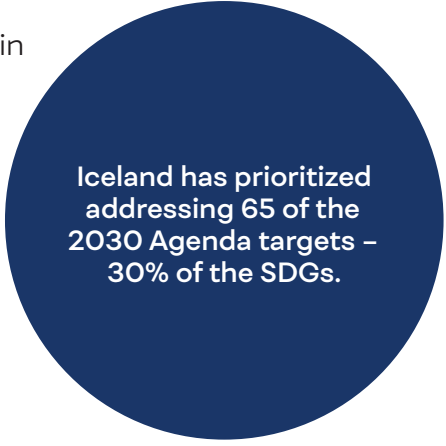
## Summary

Iceland is taking active steps towards achieving the SDGs (1) through a whole-of-government approach. These include creating health-promoting communities and involving youth. All of the strategic directions of the WHO *Roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on Health 2020, the European policy for health and well-being (2)* are being taken into account, specifically with respect to:

- advancing government and leadership and assisting local communities in the creation of supportive environments and conditions that promote healthy behaviour and the health and well-being of all inhabitants, with sustainability as one of the guiding principles;
- establishing healthy places, settings and resilient communities within the Icelandic HPC programme (within the context of the Icelandic Youth Council, young people are the main stakeholders of SDG-related activities).

These two approaches show how the Government of Iceland, in encouraging participation in the implementation of activities aimed at achieving SDGs 3 and 17 and the overall goal of leaving no one behind.

With respect to the HPC programme, the Directorate of Health approached the Interministerial working group on SDGs set up by the Government, suggesting that the HPCs work towards connecting the SDG-related activities taking place at the local level with those at the government level.



Iceland has prioritized addressing 65 of the 2030 Agenda targets – 30% of the SDGs.

## Motivation

The 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels, which are country-led and country-driven”. As part of its follow-up mechanisms, voluntary national reviews (VNRs) serve as a basis for the regular reviews carried out by the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which meets under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

(ECOSOC). These reviews facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learnt, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (3).


Iceland will present its first VNR to HLPF in 2019.

The first status report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Iceland was developed by the Interministerial working group on SDGs and published in June 2018 (4). The report provides insights into action taken – both nationally and internationally – towards achieving the SDGs (1), and maps out the main tasks, plans and challenges for each goal. Based on work done, the working group prioritized 65 of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda (5). Most of the 169 targets apply to Iceland in varying degrees, but it was clear that to achieve measurable results in working towards the SDGs (1) in Iceland there was a need to prioritize them. Doing so would improve efficiency and facilitate policy formulation and planning. Addressing the priority targets, however, does not preclude taking action towards the other targets. The SDGs (1) have been linked to numerous government policies and programmes, such as the new educational policy, a new policy for development cooperation, Iceland's Climate Action Plan for 2018–2030 and Iceland's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019.

## Action taken

### The HPC programme

The main aim of the HPC programme, which is run by the Directorate of Health, is to assist local communities in creating supportive environments and conditions that promote healthy behaviour and the health and well-being of all inhabitants with sustainability as a guiding principle. The Directorate of Health approached the Interministerial working group on SDGs, suggesting that HPCs be charged with connecting SDG-related work taking place at the local level with that at the government level. As a result, the working group and the Directorate of Health joined forces in implementing action towards achievement of the SDGs (1) through the HPC programme. They are also jointly working to raise awareness in the municipalities and among the public about sustainable development, health and well-being and the SDGs (1).



Based on the collaboration of key stakeholders across all sectors and levels of government, the HPC programme facilitates action to achieve the SDGs at both the national and municipal levels.


There are 72 municipalities in Iceland with populations ranging from 50 to 125 000. Since many SDGs (1) rest on both the national and local pillars of the administration, both levels of government (including ministries and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities) are represented in the Interministerial working group on SDGs. In November 2018, the Board of the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities agreed to systematize presentation of the SDGs (1) at the local level. This includes organizing meetings with the municipalities and establishing an SDG group, comprising representatives of the local authorities. This group will provide a forum for information sharing and discussion about the SDGs (1), as well as for promoting healthy communities.

### **The Iceland Youth Council**

One of the main emphases of the 2030 Agenda is the importance of cooperation between the different stakeholders, including youth, in working towards the SDGs (1). With this in mind, and considering Articles 12 and 13 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (6), which clearly state that children should have the right to express their opinions and influence issues that concern them, the Government decided to involve youth in SDG-related work. To this end, it established the Icelandic Youth Council in April 2018.

The Icelandic Youth Council consists of 12 representatives from across the country, aged 13–18 years. It gathers six times a year, one of which is for a meeting with the Cabinet of Iceland. An expert working with UNICEF Iceland, specialized in involving children and youth, supervises the Council on behalf of the Interministerial working group on SDGs. The Government's policy platform for priority issues triggered the establishment of the Icelandic Youth Council. It states that a good society is one that ensures children quality of life, applies the provisions of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (6), and seeks to increase the level of influence children have on the communities in which they live.

This year (2019), the Icelandic Youth Council will provide the forum for marking the 30th anniversary of the *Convention on the Rights of Child* (6) where the SDGs (1) will be the



The main role of the Icelandic Youth Council is to learn about sustainable development and the SDGs and bring them to the attention of young people and the community as a whole.

overarching theme. This forum will provide young people with an opportunity to learn about sustainable development and the SDGs (1) and to express their views on these issues.

The Icelandic Youth Council presented a declaration at the Women Leaders Global Forum, which took place in Reykjavik, Iceland, in November 2018. The Forum is co-hosted annually by Women Political Leaders and the Government and Parliament of Iceland. It is co-chaired by leaders of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Bank, World Economic Forum, and others.

In September 2018, the Icelandic Youth Council conducted a campaign in which an Icelandic teenage girl visited Uganda to experience how teenagers there live their daily lives, using the SDGs (1) as a basis for reflection. In December 2018, a three-part documentary on her experience was aired on RÚV, Iceland's national broadcasting network.

## Impact

Three surveys on public awareness about the SDGs (1) have been conducted in Iceland. The first took place in January 2018 when 46.6% of those participating said they either knew or had heard about them. In March 2018, a TV and social media campaign called "Good News from the Future" was launched, featuring news segments – supposedly from the year 2030 – about the status of the SDGs (1). The second survey, which was conducted in May 2018, showed that the ratio of participants who knew or had heard about the SDGs (1) had risen to 57.4%. In February 2019, the third campaign revealed that 65.6% of the participants either knew or had heard about the SDGs (1). Icelandic youth's knowledge about the SDGs (1) has not yet been measured.

## Lessons learnt

The comprehensive implementation of action towards achieving the SDGs (1) needs to be considered in all policy areas and across all ministries and governments, in collaboration with various stakeholders. Iceland's sector-oriented governmental structure can challenge the implementation of horizontal priorities, like SDG-related action. The small size of the

administration, on the other hand, is a facilitator as it promotes greater flexibility and the smooth implementation of fast-track activities.

Young people are the SDGs' main stakeholders and it will be their responsibility to advance sustainable development when the goals have run their course. Therefore, it is important that young people's views and concerns be taken into consideration – and made visible – in planning and implementing action to achieve the SDGs (1). Establishing a forum, which allows young people's voices to be heard – like the Icelandic Youth Council – can impact the process, not only by raising awareness about the SDGs (1) among young people, but also as a source of guidance about the action needed to achieve them.

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<sup>1</sup> All URLs accessed 6 March 2019.

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