

# GUIDEBOOK

## GOOD PRACTICES ON PRO- ECOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SLOVENIA



Information brochure

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## 1. Overview

**Introduction**

**Zero waste  
& bottom-up  
approach**

**Laying  
foundations**

**Building  
a Zero Waste City  
with examples**

**Zero Waste Cities  
Network**

**Zero Waste  
Cities Certification**

This brochure aims to present several examples and good practices in the field of pro-ecological solutions in the local governments in Slovenia. It can serve as a guide for local government employees and other local stakeholders to improve internal processes and also to improve resident's wellbeing while considering a zero waste approach. Follow the detailed zero waste plan step by step. Learn how to engage in environmental education programs for residents and campaigns to increase environmental awareness of residents.

The authors hope it will provide relevant insight, perhaps inspire replication, but at least show that sustainable solutions are possible and are already happening.

First, however, a brief look at why Slovenia has this "green" reputation.

## 2. Introduction: Why Slovenia

Slovenia is one of the cleanest and most environment-friendly countries, both in Europe and globally. It's the first European country with a zero waste capital, whilst 'green' tourism is the main marketing adage in Slovenia.

At the same time the zero waste movement is growing, with the 16 municipalities in the network already covering almost a quarter of the population. Slovenia is probably the only country in the world with a zero waste capital, zero waste events, a zero waste hotel and zero waste shops. Zero waste as a lifestyle is also becoming increasingly common.

There is a long tradition of separating waste for collection. For example, in some of the municipalities, eg. one of the best cases — in Vrhnika, the waste has been collected separately since 1996. Including organic waste!

Once we had to close many landfills due to insufficient health and safety standards, with no European funding available for waste infrastructure, there was no other option but to improve our waste management from within. This included soft measures like logistical optimization, information sharing, awareness raising, education, better control and providing incentives.

## 3. Zero waste & bottom-up approach

**The bottom-up approach with communities**, which encourages different stakeholders to cooperate and is one of the core principles of zero waste, is crucial to the success of zero waste locally and nationally.

Sustainability in a local context involves not only environmental practices such as energy conservation, but also policy efforts to involve communities, develop organizational capacity, and encourage widespread adoption of sustainable (zero waste) practices.

Local citizens are bound to take notice that government staff and elected officials are committed to improving the environment and sustainability.

## Switching mindsets from waste to resource management

We have been working with the circular economy concept in Europe for over ten years. The essence of the concept is that we try to close material loops by changing the design of products and extending the life of existing products through repair and reuse.

Zero waste strives to preserve resources for as long as possible. It is a process in which we reduce the amount of waste through constant optimization. The latter also has direct financial benefits, which is another reason to embark on the zero waste path. Reuse and recycling create far more jobs than incineration and landfills.

## Tools on the zero waste path

There are many tools to help with zero waste steps. The zero waste hierarchy offers us priority actions — by walking through the hierarchy, we think about how we can achieve the same effect with less impact on the environment in different ways. With identified problematic types of waste that need additional measures comes also the understanding why priorities of the zero waste hierarchy are important to follow at the design stage already.



*"Zero waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging and materials without burning, and with no discharges to land, water or air that threaten the environment or human health."*

## 4. Laying foundations

Cities around Europe (and the world) have embraced the goal of zero waste. It includes steps for analyzing the current situation, identifying and evaluating options, and selecting the preferred options. While the planning process can vary from city to city, the steps below are necessary to create a fully developed plan that meets the needs of the city and its residents.

### Creating a plan for cities

1. **Make zero waste commitments:** this formalizes the zero waste planning process.
2. **Ensure community participation:** meaningful public participation throughout the zero waste planning process is key to successful implementation.
3. **Evaluate current policies, programs, and facilities:** in understanding how the current waste system operates, including what materials the city's waste streams contain, allows planners and policymakers to identify a baseline for the progress.
4. **Conduct a service opportunity analysis:** assessing all the ways materials can be reused, recycled, or composted can help cities understand where they may develop new policies, programs, and businesses, or improve existing ones.
5. **Develop a zero waste strategy:** that will be adapted to the needs of the city.
6. **Conduct an economic analysis:** once zero waste strategies are selected for implementation, it is important to calculate potential costs and cost-savings to justify new investments.
7. **Create guiding principles:** this creates an opportunity for community engagement and provides context to a zero waste goal by grounding it in community values.



8. **Set goals and metrics:** cities must include a measurable and time-bound goal against which to track progress.
9. **Leverage local processes to bring zero waste into policy:** climate action plans, general plans, the budgetary process, and waste contracts are some of the ways cities can expressly turn zero waste into policy.

### Building a zero waste city

Local governments are employing zero waste strategies tailored to their specific goals, capacities, and needs. Residents, businesses, nonprofits, and other local institutions are key partners in effective strategy design and implementation. This section describes the overarching options your municipality may select in creating its own **zero waste plan**.

1. **Build zero waste infrastructure:** investments in local infrastructure that enables separate waste collection, support reuse and reduction efforts while providing recycling or composting options at the end of a product's life can build a circular economy, create jobs, and open opportunities for economic development.

**Example:** Every community should have a REUSE center where second-hand items can be bought and repaired. Usually they are run as social enterprises and their priority is to encourage and promote the reuse of used products, carrying out upcycling products and transforming them into new unique masterpieces. However, some centers go a step further and build their own brands, such as [Depo reuse center in Vrhnika](#), where bags are created from seat belts, airbags, sailboats or ski jumpers' jerseys.



2. **Ban disposables and create reuse/refill systems:** eliminating single-use disposable packaging and foodware and replacing them with reusable/refillable alternatives is a straightforward strategy to reduce waste at the source.

**Example:** To tackle the wave of single-use, about a quarter of all Slovenian municipalities have joined the initiative **to reduce single-use plastic in public and internal events organized by municipalities**. Single-use items like plastic plates, cups and cutlery are replaced by reusable ones (glass, ceramics, metal, reusable and washable plastics...). At the same time the local governmental units can set a great example and raise awareness about **responsible event organization** through:

- Promoting tap water drinking and refillable bottles everywhere (also in touristic areas like Bled and Ljubljana), in addition to expanding the system of public drinking fountains.
- Removing coffee machines with automatic single use cups serving from the offices and providing an option to take a coffee with a personal cup.
- Ban single use plastic bags at local fresh markets, supermarkets and promote the use of bags from lasting materials to be reused over and over again, or ban single use cutlery and cups at all public events.
- Organizing workshops for local event organizers and encouraging them to take measures that minimize the waste generation also boosted with economic incentives (eg. reducing the rent fee, reducing the waste management fee if waste is being separated at the event etc.).





3. **Support zero waste businesses:** assisting businesses in embracing zero waste practices and supporting businesses that provide zero waste goods or services is instrumental to the success of a zero waste plan (eg. packaging free shops, package-free food delivery, reusable diapers service, furniture renovation, etc.).

**Example:** In Vrhnika kindergarten, as a first in the country, they have been using reusable/washable diapers since 2014 on the initiative of Ekologi brez meja. Washable diapers are made by Slovenian manufacturer [Racman](#) and together they have created a very effective model to reduce the use of disposable diapers. The purpose of the project was to encourage the use of washable diapers and to change the mindset in the direction that their use is simple, more affordable, has positive effects on both children's health and the environment - reduces the generation of mixed municipal waste. The initiative was prioritized because the municipality of Vrhnika joined the Zero Waste Cities network.

There are not only environmental benefits but also economic ones as the kindergarten managed to save money in comparison with the use of disposable diapers. They cut down the quantity of material that cannot be recycled from 140 to 70 tons a year – they save around 5.000 euros a year.

To know more about the project and other sustainable practices in Vrhnika Kindergarten [see this video, in english](#).



4. **Lead by example and build zero waste institutions:** educating employees in local governments and other institutions to embrace and adopt zero waste practices in their daily life can create a shift to lead by example, and spread those practices at their households and local communities.

**Example:** In 2020 Ljubljana has designed a *Code on circular and sustainable business of the city administration*, the purpose of which is to increase the commitment of employees in the city administration in implementing the principles of sustainable development and the circular economy. It is also the first example of such practice between cities, which will further strengthen the recognition of Ljubljana as green in Slovenian and European space.

In addition to the code, they also prepared a *Handbook for making sustainable and circular everyday decisions*, with the aim of proving that sustainable, circular choices are achievable, feasible and competitive. The manual explains in more detail the 10 fundamental principles of the circular economy, with concrete steps for implementation, a description of already existing good practices and a proposal for performance indicators.

5. **Include zero waste principles in the public procurement:** cities can follow best practices when drafting contracts that increase waste reduction and promote the circular economy. Leveraging the purchasing power of local governments and other institutions can create local markets for zero waste products and services, shift a substantial portion of municipal waste streams, and serve as a model for citywide change.

**Example:** The public sector is a large and important consumer. The integration of environmental criteria into its **purchasing decisions, or green public procurement**, is recognized as a key mechanism for promoting sustainable production and consumption, while at the same time creating significant public financial savings. Ljubljana has had zero waste criterias included in its procurement policies since 2018, covering [hygiene sanitary products](#) to be made from materials with environmental aspects and safety, and when it comes to electrical and electronic equipment refurbished one is prioritized.



6. **Encourage source separation and waste reduction:** reducing and separating waste at the source is a necessary part of minimizing waste streams and ensuring that discards are uncontaminated and prepared for reuse, recycling, and compost (eg. via pay-as-you-throw systems or other economic incentives).

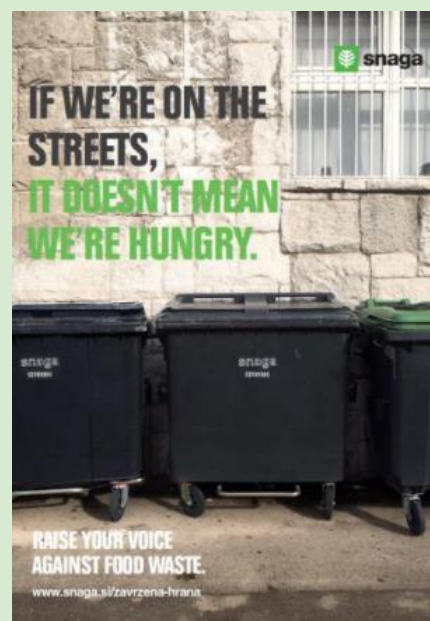
**Example:** Slovenia has had door-to-door separate collection of five waste streams since the early 2000's, including organics (2011), which is the most important waste to separate. It represents about 30 to 40% of our household waste in Europe, and when collected separately it has great potential to transform into high-quality compost and avoids the contamination of other waste streams. Alternatively, organic waste is an untapped energy source to create biogas through anaerobic digestion technologies.



Moreover, in the municipality of Vrhnika inhabitants have the option of taking over a free composter for individual (home) composting. It's a way to reduce the monthly bill and at the same time to improve waste separation. In addition, inhabitants can bring their separated waste to the collection center where they get a discount for their next waste bill.

7. **Awareness raising:** still too often there remains a lack of knowledge and awareness about what exactly zero waste is. To avoid this and improve its understanding, raising awareness through storytelling, education of employees in local governments, national and local campaigns, collaboration with educational institutions, businesses, and promoting waste reduction and reuse at local events, present the tools to connect to different target groups to easily relate to zero waste topics.

**Example 1:** To tackle the problem of food waste in Ljubljana they have organized a campaign [\*“Raise your voice for food waste”\*](#) with the aim to change the relation and perception of food so that it will again become an important value — and thus reduce food waste — through video clips, social network activities, various urban interventions, etc. In a society of affluence, comfort and excessive consumption we will only reduce the amount of food waste with a more respectful attitude towards these essentials. *Best practices, lifestyle tips and tricks about sustainability were collected in a yearly publication named “[Snagazin](#)”.*



**Example 2:** To communicate with users, the waste manager of Vrhnika uses several methods of informing and raising awareness, which mainly include notices on the backside of monthly invoices, announcements via the radio, articles in their local newspaper, leaflets, billboards, banners, participation in local events, organizing study tours and lectures for school children and youth and other interested groups. Eg. children coming from this area are visiting their waste management company and reuse center at least 3x times during their education period. In this way they get more and more familiar with the topic of waste and its prevention, reduction practices.

## 5. Zero Waste Cities Network

Currently, there are around [450 cities](#) included in a **Zero Waste Cities programme**. An active network of zero waste experts across Europe ensures that no matter where a city is based or its starting point, they will be able to join the movement. This is based on a traditional model where cities sign an international commitment, but the daily monitoring of progress is led by local groups on the ground. In Slovenia this role is played by *Ekologi brez meja* who already

accompanied 16 municipalities on their way towards a zero waste society — covering a quarter of the national population.

Since 2014, when the first municipalities joined the zero waste network in Slovenia, at least 18,600 tons of mixed municipal waste was avoided and thus about 4 million euros have been saved just from avoided disposal.

### **Why join the Zero Waste Cities Programme?**

There are obvious **environmental and health benefits** for the local community if less waste is generated. With less waste landfilled or incinerated, there is a dramatic reduction in the risk of both humans and the local environment suffering from the negative impacts of toxic pollution — be it via land, air, or water exposure.

Zero waste is increasingly seen as an important tool to help tackle climate change through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions during the entire lifecycle of a material.

Emissions can also be greatly reduced by simply ensuring that a product or material doesn't become waste in the first place. **Reuse and repair strategies** have the biggest climate potential impact, reducing the need for energy and resources in the extraction and manufacturing phases of their lifecycle.

Secondly, there are the **economic benefits** available to municipalities who adopt a zero waste strategy, especially if it is compliant with the new certification criteria (see next section). There are direct savings for municipalities, by paying lower disposal fees and by utilizing more optimised collection. This is complemented by an increase in potential revenue stemming from the sales of higher quality and bigger quantities of recyclable materials which could be sold onto the secondary material market.

Through the work with municipalities we are seeing the positive benefits of this approach, with communities feeling a sense of ownership, cohesion and pride over how their local area operates.

Explore our extensive network or better yet: become part of it!



## 6. Zero Waste Cities Certification

In 2021, the [Mission Zero Academy](#) (MiZA) launched the world's first Zero Waste Cities Certification. The Certification is an exciting evolution of the work done and expertise captured within Zero Waste Europe's Zero Waste Cities programme over the last ten years. It provides a robust framework for municipalities to follow in order to ensure their policies are effective and have their desired impact, whilst also creating a tool to encourage and celebrate Europe's best performers.

[The Certification](#) is a 2-step process based upon a scorecard system that provides minimum standards for municipalities to meet, whilst also rewarding the best performing local authorities.

The first step is based upon the commitment a municipality makes, [meeting the minimum criteria](#) needed in order to become a **Zero Waste Candidate City**.

The second step for municipalities to become a **Zero Waste Certified City** is [based on a scorecard system that includes both mandatory and points-based criteria](#) that municipalities are measured against:

- ➔Mandatory criteria form the minimum requirements of a zero waste city;
- ➔Points-based criteria will be scored depending on the ambition and impact of each policy. The combination of these points together will define the municipality's level of certification (and its subsequent number of stars, with 1 star being the minimum and 5 stars the highest).

There are certain fees that are requested from municipalities who become Certified with MiZA. Fees are calculated using two key indicators: the purchasing power of the country where the municipality is located, and the municipality's population size. With the payment of the small fee, municipalities will gain privileged access to the data-driven services of MiZA and a set number of mentoring hours provided by a local zero waste expert.

Explore more on the [Certification](#) which provides the most robust and structured framework on what a Zero Waste City is.

## Resources and more inspiration

- [The Zero waste Masterplan](#), GAIA, 2020 - a guide to building just and resilient zero waste cities
- [The Zero Waste Cities Masterplan](#), ZWE, 2020 - an in-depth introduction to zero waste and what it means for municipalities
- [The State of Zero Waste Municipalities Report](#) - the most comprehensive overview of the current network of Zero Waste Cities and the impact they are having
- [Creating a methodology for zero waste municipalities](#), which includes the [savings calculator](#) - help to visualise and understand the benefits that adopting zero waste policies can bring to the local area
- [Zero Waste Cities best practice case studies](#) – presentations about the best examples of zero waste at the local level
- [The Keep it Clean Plan](#) – a practical guidebook on how to start implementing zero waste on different levels of society

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