



European  
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**EMAS**

VERIFIED  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
MANAGEMENT

**SUCCESS  
STORY**

**ICS:**

Taking care of people and the  
environment through EMAS

December 2022

Environment

The **Institut Català de la Salut** (ICS) is the biggest public institution providing health care to the population in Catalonia, and it also develops training and research in the field of health.

It is made up of 9 territorial divisions (Barcelona city, northern metropolitan area, southern metropolitan area, central Catalonia, Girona, High Pyrenees and Aran, Lleida, Terres de l'Ebre and Camp de Tarragona) endowed

with the highest management bodies for all the health centres, services and institutions within their territorial jurisdiction. The ICS consists of a network of 332 primary care centres, 617 local health offices, and 8 hospitals, which together have more than 47,000 professionals and more than 9,000 undergraduate students.

74.9% of the population of Catalonia is assigned to the primary care services of the ICS.



## Why did your company join EMAS?

It all began with a pilot project in 2005, which led to the implementation of EMAS in 21 centres acquiring registration in 2009, and since then the number of centres has increased to the current 145, distributed among the 9 territorial areas of the ICS.

With the approval in 2016 of the new strategic framework, a new plan has been established with 10 strategic lines and the main objective of promoting a healthcare management model from the perspective of corporate social responsibility, aimed at boosting economic sustainability measures, rationalising and optimising the use of energy resources, improving the working environment and promoting commitment to the company and positioning the organisation in the social and institutional context as a responsible company. Currently, the implementation of EMAS is one of the three specific objectives of the environmental sustainability line and therefore more and more centres will be incorporated under the EMAS scope.

When planning to start eco-management, the ICS chose EMAS as a stricter and more prestigious scheme, with the additional strength of being led by the European Commission. EMAS helped to structure the pre-existing environmental actions and unify the environmental strategy in such a big organization. Furthermore, the EMAS demand to make public the environmental performance has been essential as a public institution that is bound to absolute transparency. After 13 years on EMAS, the experience has been anything but successful, and the target is to keep on making the number of EMAS registered health centres bigger and bigger.



## Main results so far?

One of the biggest results so far has been the reduction of energy consumption per visit by 5.6% in 2018 (across all centres) to a reduction of 36.29% in 2020.

A significant reduction in paper consumption for administrative tasks (kg paper/visit) has also been achieved, with a reduction of 3.96% in 2019 and 39.92% in 2020. Evidently, in the case of these consumptions, 2020 was significantly affected by the pandemic, but, within all the negative aspects of a health situation like this, the context facilitated the massive extension of "My Health" (La meva salut), an online tool in which both citizens and health staff can access and interact in an agile way, without having to travel to the healthcare centre and without the need for paper documents. This means that part of the environmental results obtained can be maintained in the medium and long term, as there has been a change in the management of information and in the management of certain tasks and services.

Managing so many centres is not an easy task, but, on the other hand, it also offers the possibility to carry out comparative studies and to know which centres are more efficient in the use of resources in order to prioritise the various interventions and improvement actions.

In relation to actions to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, 51 centres already have solar panels for hot water production, one centre has a biomass boiler and another uses district heating from a municipal biomass installation. Thirteen centres have a domestic hot water production system using an aerothermal heat pump that allows them to reach the standard 60°C with a very low energy cost, and heat recovery units that preheat the flow of clean incoming air, and two centres have a photovoltaic installation to generate electricity for self-consumption. A new plan that has already started

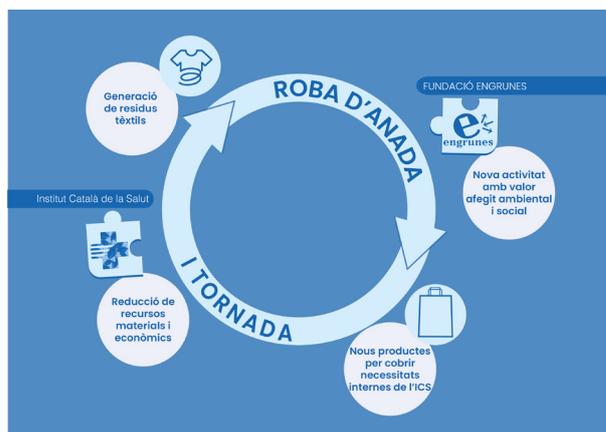
is aimed to install photovoltaic panels in 270 primary care centers, intending to self-produce an average 30% of their electric consumption. In addition, since 2018, energy from renewable sources with a certificate of origin has been contracted for all ICS facilities.

On the other hand, energy efficiency has also been achieved thanks to the replacement of light bulbs with LEDs, better management of temperatures and operating hours of air conditioning and heating systems, and awareness campaigns to support good practices that have been implemented in the day-to-day running of the centres.

Unfortunately, some aspects such as waste generation have increased due to the pandemic and are expected to decrease again when normal operating conditions are restored.

The activity of the health centres is public-facing and represents a great opportunity to promote good environmental practices among the public, not only to highlight the work carried out by the centres, but also as a way for the public to adopt them at home and understand the close link between human health and the health of our environment. For the communication campaigns, the ICS has created a name (#ICSverds), a logo and specific icons, which are used in internal and public communications. From a communication point of view, they have managed to position themselves in social networks in order to have a greater impact on society and, although it is a difficult impact to measure in the short term, it is expected to contribute in the medium and long term to the adoption of healthier and more sustainable good practices by all stakeholders.

For this same reason, new projects have also been undertaken that have involved other stakeholders and that can have an impact on the centres themselves, but also on the population in general. This is the case of the “Round trip textiles” project, in which work has been carried out with a Special Work Centre that is also EMAS registered, to reuse the textile waste generated in the laundry that serves the ICS. In the pilot test that has already begun and which has been presented as part of the 2022 European Week for Waste Prevention, 3,000 kg of sheet fabric have been used to replace almost 250,000 plastic bags that are used for dispensing products in pharmacies and for transporting linens and laundry. Although this project has been implemented in one of the hospitals that do not yet have EMAS, the idea came from the primary care centres that already have EMAS and have developed an interesting capacity to take up environmental challenges at the level of the entire organisation. Part of the bags will also serve 36 of the primary care centres.



## What do you have in mind for the future?

One of the impacts of healthcare activity is related to patient and staff travel to health centres. During the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the primary care activity became remote, by telematic or telephonic means. The return to normality should mean a recovery of face-to-face visits, but it is necessary to take advantage of the opportunity to maintain part of these remote visits that avoid emissions due to user mobility. The challenge faced by ICS is to be able to continue to offer a quality health service maintaining by telematic means those visits for procedures and consultations that do not require close contact with patients in order to reduce GHG emissions from patients (approximately 0.079 Kg CO<sub>2</sub> per each avoided face-to-face visit), traffic congestion and noise in urban areas.

In the near future, the efforts will focus on increasing communication activity to reach even more stakeholders and the general population and raise awareness of the importance of reducing the impact that healthcare has on the environment.

The main environmental targets are bound to keep on decreasing paper use, massively increasing the photovoltaic power self-production, promoting sustainable mobility, and ending the purchase of single-use batteries for electro-medical equipment.

And as an EMAS organization, the plan is to reach the 200 registered centres in the next two years.

## Contact

<https://ics.gencat.cat/ca/lics/responsabilitat-social-corporativa/gestio-ambiental/ics-verds/index.html>