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# Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy

## General overview

Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVGR) is an autonomous region with special statute. Situated in the extreme north east of Italy, it borders with Austria to the north, Slovenia to the east and the Adriatic Sea to the south. Its strategic position for communication with both northern and eastern Europe is enhanced by appropriate infrastructures, such as motorways, railways and port networks.

FVGR covers a geographical area of 7924 km<sup>2</sup> (2.6% of the total area of Italy). The landscape of the region is very varied: the Alpine mountain range, where only 5.2% of the population live, stands out to the north (42.6% of the territory) and slopes down to the hills (19.3%), plains (38%) and coast to the south. Biodiversity adds value to the region and is strongly protected: 17.1% of the territory comprises parks, nature reserves and biotypes (1,2). FVGR has a population of

1 198 753 (2% of the total for Italy) distributed among 215 municipalities, most with fewer than 5000 inhabitants (71.3%). GDP per capita is € 31 923 (3,4).

A very large proportion of older people is over 65 years of age (26%) and the birth rate is very low. Young foreign residents (8.6% of the population) only partly offset the gradual ageing of the population (3,4). In 2020, life expectancy at birth was 80.8 years and 85.7 years for men and women, respectively (3,4).

In Italy, the health system is based on the Beveridge model (5). In FVGR, three local health authorities provide health care in all the provinces through an integrated and capillary network of services. These include: three tertiary hospitals (specializing in oncology, paediatrics and rehabilitation); long-

term care; home care; mental-health services; palliative care; paediatric care; and public health centres. The regional health system, the municipal

social services and various sports and social-promotion associations are well integrated.

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## Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



### Moving towards UHC

As mentioned above, the Italian health system is based on the Beveridge model (5). In FVGR, five local health authorities provide health care in all the provinces through an integrated and capillary network of services, including: three tertiary hospitals (specializing in oncology, paediatrics and rehabilitation); long-term care; home care; mental health and addiction services; palliative care; paediatric care; and public health centres. The regional health system, the social services of the municipalities and various associations, nongovernmental organizations and agencies in the region are well integrated and constitute an effective network, providing adequate care for people suffering from acute and, especially, chronic diseases.

As in most developed countries, the top three causes of death in FVGR are cardiovascular, oncological and respiratory diseases and, therefore, much effort is spent on health-promotion programmes. The budget for health care, health promotion, prevention and social policies is equivalent to 55% of that of the Regional Government. In FVGR, there is a strong orientation towards the voluntary sector; 1196 voluntary organizations are actively engaged in voluntary activities (6).



### Promoting health and well-being

The Regional Health and Equity Profile, elaborated in 2020, highlights some of the main elements on which action must be taken to ensure equity in health for all citizens (7). Its stratified analysis of the epidemiological data illustrates the relationship between lifestyle, citizenship, age, employment status and education level in the different territories. This facilitates the punctual and effective planning of targeted socio–health integration measures to meet citizens’ needs and fight inequalities.

Action aimed at ensuring equity and fighting inequalities is also included in the 16 programmes of the recently approved 2021–2025 Regional Prevention Plan. The goal is to increase the skills and knowledge of health-care professionals in relation to inequalities. This includes familiarizing them with validated tools, such as the Health Equity Audit, and research and action processes to support the analysis of inequalities and possible corrective action.

The PRISMA-7 Research Program on the Integration of Services for the Maintenance of Autonomy (PRISMA) has been conducting a survey (based on seven questions requiring “yes or no” answers), aimed at identifying people over the age of 75 years who are in significant functional decline.



## Protecting against health emergencies

Experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for regional plans defining action required at the various stages (preparedness, alert and response) in the main social and health areas.

FVGR’s pandemic plan outlines the different activities to be conducted and allocates responsibilities in dealing with infection-related emergencies. The region also has specific plans for the provision of rapid and effective response to catastrophic health emergencies (for example, serious road-traffic accidents or nuclear emergencies).

Emergency governance (different levels of responsibility in the management of emergencies, including control lines and communication flows) must be clearly defined. The pandemic plan includes simulations of and practical tests in managing health emergencies that involve the entire regional health system and all relevant connections.

A plan for enhancing the number of available hospital beds and local health-care services in case of emergencies is also in place. This also involves general practitioners and paediatricians. Epidemiological and microbiological surveillance is active in the flu season and also encompasses the use of antibiotics (in both humans and animals) and antibiotic resistance. Prevention measures in the various scenarios are defined for both the population and health-care professionals. Training and updates are aimed at health-care professionals. A communication plan is in place, which involves advising the population on the adoption of useful behaviours in dealing with and overcoming emergencies, as well as in participating in vaccination campaigns.

FVGR is involved in policies on promoting active and healthy ageing, and in strengthening networks aimed at combatting loneliness. The region also promotes studies aimed at finding innovative and alternative solutions to housing older people in retirement homes.

Efforts are also being made to construct accommodation suitable for frail individuals, with shared spaces and ready access to social and health services.

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## Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

### *Initiatives relative to Digital Health*

The Regional Digital Agenda has identified three priorities relative to improving patients' lives and responding to the needs of a constantly ageing population, namely:

- the electronic health record system to enable the collection of all the data and health information comprising a person's clinical history, and to help health professionals ensure continuity of care through the various care services;
- the electronic prescribing cycle, which provides a telematic link between doctors,

citizens, pharmacies, the FVGR authorities, and the Ministry of the Economy to improve services for citizens, ensure greater security, facilitate the control of spending, and provide transparency regarding the consumption of pharmaceuticals prescribed by doctors;

- the development of new online health services, such as an emergency app that, for example, provides information about real-time situations in emergency rooms, or online access to reports, and facilitates calls for help.

### *Initiatives relative to European Immunization Agenda 2030*

FVGR operates in accordance with the national vaccination plan.

### *Initiatives relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight*

The main interventions to support and promote health and well-being are included in the Regional Prevention Plan 2020–2025. These involve intersectoral action, including local authorities (municipalities) and associations, aimed at training health and non-health personnel and launching communication campaigns.

FVGR is working to empower people to make healthy lifestyle choices (which can safeguard them against developing chronic noncommunicable diseases) throughout life and in different settings (home, work and school), by promoting physical activity and healthy nutrition.

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## **Initiative specific to Friuli-Venezia Giulia**

In FVGR, several health-promotion initiatives with a multidisciplinary intersectoral approach are taking place in schools, communities and workplaces.

The network of health-promoting schools is developing in the region. Following the international approach to intervention on physical environment, several projects are underway. These relate to: the development of social relationships in

the school community; the promotion of physical activity and healthy nutrition among children; and the development of children's life skills, emotional knowledge and awareness.

Projects have been launched with the municipalities to promote healthy lifestyles and participatory welfare.

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## The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. empowering and educating people, using a life-course perspective from childhood;
2. building citizens' resilience and increasing their participation in health-related decision-making processes;
3. developing projects related to "ageing in place" and "silver economy" to tackle the challenges of an ageing society.

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## Main partners and collaborators

These are:

- the University of Trieste;
- the University of Udine;
- Federsanità ANCI FVG (an association of municipalities, health authorities and personal services working to promote the integration of pathways to social and health care ) (<https://federsanita.anci.fvg.it/>);
- Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani – ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) (<https://anci.fvg.it/>);
- Scuola Internazionale Superiore di Studi Avanzati – SISSA (International School of Advanced Studies, Trieste) (<https://www.sissa.it/>).

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1 All URLs accessed 20 February 2023.