



Nordic walking in a rural area of the Pomurje Region with Danilo Türk, former President of Slovenia

Pomurje Region, Slovenia



General overview

The Pomurje Region is situated in the north-eastern part of Slovenia, bordering with Austria, Croatia and Hungary. Comprising 27 municipalities, the Region encompasses a total area of 1337 km², and has a population of 114 397 (2020) (1). It is one of 12 statistical regions and nine health regions in the country.

Since Slovenia became independent in 1991, Pomurje has been one of the least developed and most deprived regions in the country, its gross domestic product (GDP) (€ 15 448 per capita) and rates of unemployment ranking lowest and highest, respectively (1). At the same time, the Region's health and lifestyle indicators are among the worst in Slovenia. These two unfavourable parameters can be clearly linked to and identified as health inequalities between the different regions in the country. Education indexes show the same

picture: 28.6% of the population in Pomurje (or less – the average for Slovenia is 20.8%) have primary-school education, 55% have secondary-school education, and only 15% have completed tertiary education; 10.5% of the population is engaged in lifelong learning (the average for Slovenia is 16%) (1). Life expectancy at birth per 100 000 is 75.5 years and 81.4 years for men and women, respectively (1).

The Pomurje Region, where 6% of the population of Slovenia live, contributes 3.8% to the national GDP, which means that GDP per capita in the Region is lower than the average for the country. The approximately 8000 companies operating in the Region represent about 4% of all companies in Slovenia. Agriculture is still one of the main sectors of the economy (1).

One of the most developed sectors in Pomurje, and that with the greatest potential, is tourism. The Region has 7100 beds (half of them in hotels) and is accountable for approximately 912 000 (9%)

of all overnight stays in the country. Of these, approximately 370 000 (41%) were attributable to foreign tourists, more than half from neighbouring Austria (2).

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

The Slovene health-care system is based on solidarity. In Slovenia, out of a population of just over 2 million, the economically active (approximately 870 000) and their employers carry the highest financial burden (almost 76%). While public financing through the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia (HIIS) is mainly progressive, Voluntary Health Insurance (VHI) funding is regressive as it is based on a flat payment. Despite having relatively high levels of cost-sharing, these expenses are counterbalanced by VHI, which is purchased by 95% of the population liable for co-payments. Furthermore, the Government covers certain VHI claims on behalf of poorer households (3). Slovene households are largely protected from the costs of health care, although the share of private sources in health-care funding is 26.9% (4).

In 2016, health-care services were delivered by 63 primary-health-care (PHC) centres at 479 health-care entry points, and by 10 general hospitals and 2 public health institutes at 25 such locations. The health-care system employs just short of 48 000 medical and non-medical personnel nationwide. Health-care delivery in the Pomurje Region is organized at both the primary and secondary levels.

One regional general hospital and four PHC centres (Gornja Radgona, Lendava, Ljutomer and Murska Sobota) are operating at 35 locations. In addition, there are 28 dental clinics at the primary level and two at the secondary level, 88 private health-care providers offer primary and secondary health-care services, and four spa resorts are available for rehabilitation purposes.



Promoting health and well-being

In December 2017, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 entitled “Slovenia, a country with a high quality of life for all”. The Strategy presents a new long-term national development framework. With five strategic orientations and twelve interconnected development goals, it sets a new foundation for the future development of Slovenia. By committing to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Slovenia recognizes the importance of a sustainable, inclusive and more conscious future in which society as a whole can flourish (5).

The data show a systematic increase in healthy lifestyle also in the Pomurje Region in general (1). All the national prevention programmes are implemented in all Slovene regions through different agents, mainly PHC centres, NIPH regional units, hospitals and other organizations (such as nongovernmental organizations, schools, spas and wellness companies). In general, people in the Region are living more healthily with better nutrition, more recreation time, more exercise and less smoking.

Lifestyle and health-behaviour indicators are especially problematic with regard to the Roma population, as are other health indicators. This means that taking a universal approach alone is not sufficient on its own and that there is a need to introduce measures targeting the most vulnerable in the Region.



Protecting against health emergencies

Disaster management (civil protection) in Slovenia is organized as an integrated system, which includes various parties: rescue units and services (professional, voluntary, civil-protection), humanitarian organizations, research institutions, and governmental administrative bodies. The unified system is based on humanitarian principles and in line with international standards. Regulated by the Act on Protection against Natural and Other Disasters and other sector-specific acts, it addresses all phases of the disaster-management cycle: prevention, preparedness, disaster response, and recovery.

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.)

The Pomurje Region has chosen HEALTH as its flagship initiative. The vision of the Regional Development Programme for Pomurje 2021–2027 is “Healthy Pomurje 2030” (6). The aim is to activate the regional potential required to restructure the Pomurje Region towards developing long-term comparative advantages. These are identified as sustainable, integrated and innovative solutions in the field of health – from healthy environment (related to the Region’s capability of attracting

innovative and creative youth) to the sustainable production, processing and distribution of healthy food. It also envisages the development of services and innovative approaches to enabling healthy and active ageing in the Region.

The identified programmes will support the development of products and services related to core development specialization and the following three key development areas:

- healthy natural, social and economic environment
- healthy food and vital rural areas
- healthy ageing and a connected society.

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

These are:

1. exchange of good practice related to and experiences in improving health and well-being through economic development;
2. healthy and active ageing in rural areas;
3. cross-border cooperation with neighbouring regions and countries on health and in health emergencies.

Main partners and collaborators

These are:

- the Government of Slovenia;
- the municipalities;
- the Regional Development Agency and subregional development agencies;
- governmental agencies in Pomurje (employment, social work, health-care system, education system);
- nongovernment organizations, including sports and pensioners associations;
- international networks (for example, the WHO Regions for Health Network, the WHO Healthy Cities Network);
- national PHC centres.

Contact list

Peter Bezec
Director
Centre for Health and Development Murska
Sobota
Murska Sobota
Email: peter.beznec@czr.si

Ana Šabjan
Project manager
Centre for Health and Development Murska
Sobota
Murska Sobota
Email: ana.sabjan@czr.si

References¹

1. Slovenske statistične regije in občine v številkah [Slovenian statistical regions and municipalities in numbers]. In: Republika Slovenija statistični [database]. Ljubljana: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia; 2020 (in Slovenian) (<https://www.stat.si/obcine>).
2. Letna publikacija turizem v številkah 2021. Ljubljana: Slovenian Tourist Organization; 2022 (in Slovenian) (https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/dokumenti/tvs/2021/2021_Turizem_v_številkah.pdf).
3. Albreht T, Klazinga N. Privatisation of health care in Slovenia in the period 1992–2008. *Health Policy*. 2009;90(2–3):262–9, doi: 10.1016/j.healthpol.2008.10.007 (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0168851008002297?via%3Dihub>).
4. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia [website]. Ljubljana: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia; 2022 (<https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/10394>).
5. Slovenian Development Strategy 2030. Ljubljana: Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2017 (<https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Slovenian-Development-Strategy-2030.pdf>).
6. Regionalni razvojni program pomurske regije 2021–2027 [Regional development programme of the Pomurje Region 2021–2027]. Murska Sobota: Razvojni Center Murska Sobota; 2022 (in Slovenian) (https://www.rcms.si/upload/files/RRP_Pomurje_2021-2027_13-6-2022.pdf).

1 All URLs accessed 21 September 2022.