



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

Pomurje Region, Slovenia

General overview

Pomurje is one of 12 regions in Slovenia. Located in the north-eastern part of the country, it borders Austria, Croatia and Hungary. Covering an area of 1337 km², it has around 117 000 inhabitants (roughly 5% of the Slovenian population), including a Hungarian minority and a Roma population. Pomurje is one of the most deprived regions in Slovenia: it has the highest unemployment rate (12,5% in 2015) and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (€12 437 in 2015), which is 66.5% of the national average (€18 693) (1).

In Slovenia, there are no regional governments. The regions are statistical areas and there is no level of authority between the municipalities and the national Government. The regions do, however, have regional development councils that take decisions on their future development and the allocation of certain development resources. Primary health care (PHC) falls under municipal authority, and secondary and tertiary care under national authority; all are funded through the Universal State Insurance Fund and private insurances. High unemployment, unhealthy lifestyle and a low level of education are the main drivers of health inequity in the Pomurje Region where a tradition of agriculture prevails (2).

Data and statistics in the *Regional development programme for Pomurje region 2014–2020* illustrate that life expectancy in the Pomurje Region is three years below the national average for men and two years below the national average for women (3).

According to data of the National Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia, the Region also presents the highest rate of mortality caused by cardiovascular diseases and the highest premature-death rate for men in Slovenia (4).

The unemployment rate in Pomurje has been high since the transition period in the nineties. The global financial crisis (2007–2008) hit the Region harder than the rest of Slovenia, causing a decline in GDP growth. Although Pomurje was fairly industrialized in the 20th century, mainly producing textiles, agricultural machinery, food and beverages, and tourism services, the Region was and still is traditionally agricultural with a large share of the farmers in a low-income bracket. In addition, the Region's share of older people is above the national average. One of the main reasons for the high unemployment rate in Pomurje is the collapse of the textile industry in Europe in the nineties, the aftermath of which

is still being felt. The Region was not prepared for structural unemployment and it took several years to close most of the textile factories. Because of the loss of markets in former Yugoslavia and the inability of European Union (EU) countries to replace them adequately, other traditional industries also suffered, if not as hard, significantly enough to contribute to raising the unemployment rate.

Nevertheless, Pomurje was one of the first regions to put health on the regional agenda as a development opportunity. The Centre for Health and Development Murska Sobota represents the Region in many international projects and was designated as a WHO collaboration centre for cross-sectoral approaches to health and development. A number of projects have

been carried out through the cross-sectoral Regional Action Group established to tackle health inequities, helping to introduce positive changes in how institutions, decision-makers and the population perceive health. As a result, different sectors began to work together to better the health of the population. For example, in recognizing their influence on and interest in each other, the sectors for agriculture, tourism and health set out to develop tourism in the traditionally agricultural region. Its small size makes it possible for the Pomurje Region to be very flexible in piloting or introducing new ways of tackling health inequities, which proved necessary in connection with the most recent demographic changes, economic crises and natural disasters.



Strengths

Pomurje's strengths include:

- ✓ universal health-care insurance and a health system based on decentralized, accessible health care centres and regional hospitals;
- ✓ investment in building regional stakeholder capacity for tackling the social determinants of health;
- ✓ investment in intersectoral communication on the connection between the social determinants of health and the health outcomes and well-being of the population;
- ✓ a history of strong investment in social cohesion, particularly at the local level;
- ✓ recognized wellness centres as part of a strong tourism infrastructure for active leisure time;
- ✓ the location of the Region in the centre of Europe, which is easily accessible by road and air (Graz and Vienna, Austria; Zagreb, Croatia; Budapest, Hungary; and Ljubljana, Slovenia).



Aspirations

Pomurje aims to:

- ✓ further reduce persistent health inequities between regions and different population groups as a result of socioeconomic conditions;
- ✓ prevent new inequities, especially those connected with ageing;
- ✓ introduce the Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach (5,6) in efforts at the regional level towards the well-being of the population;
- ✓ introduce palliative care and integrated health-/social-care services;
- ✓ encourage active mobility among the population;
- ✓ enhance tourism–health/agriculture–health opportunities for sustainable growth;
- ✓ increase the physical-activity and healthy-eating habits of different target groups;
- ✓ increase the use of locally produced food in public-sector institutions (kindergartens, schools, hospitals, homes for the elderly, etc.);
- ✓ exchange best practice in reducing health inequities with other regions.

Challenges

These are:

- ✓ lack of autonomy and limited financial resources at the regional level;
- ✓ lack of resilience in changing behaviours, habits and ways of thinking, and in taking action;
- ✓ low morale among the population regarding the economic situation in the Pomurje Region;
- ✓ emigration (brain drain) of highly skilled workers (mainly to Austria) in recent years, and the resulting limited human resources;
- ✓ lower (or the lowest) income, education and employment rates compared to the national averages.

Potential areas of collaboration

The Pomurje Region would be interested in collaborating with other regions on:

- ✓ tackling health inequities in local communities;
- ✓ health promotion (nutrition and physical activity);
- ✓ cross-sectoral approaches to health and development.

Working groups

The Pomurje Region is interested in participating in working groups on:

- ✓ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (7)/ equity;
- ✓ health systems/primary health care;
- ✓ participatory approaches/resilience;
- ✓ the all-of-government approach/intersectoral action;
- ✓ health promotion/nutrition and physical activity.

People active in the Regions for Health Network (RHN)

Political focal point

Branko Drvarič

President, Regional Development Council, Pomurje Region
Murska Sobota

Technical focal point

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