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HR4ALL



HR4ALL aims to better understand the challenges and possible solutions to tackling the multifactorial dimensions of obesity and implement this in policies.



SOCIAL



€
1.26 M
EU financing



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An interregional cooperation project for
improving **Social inclusion** policies

Project Partners

Municipality of Haderslev (DK)
Development center Murska Sobota (SI)
Gasol Foundation (ES)
Municipality of Sant Boi de Llobregat (ES)
PON - Partnership Overweight Netherlands (NL)
The Region of Southern Denmark (DK)
University Rehabilitation Institute, Republic of Slovenia (URI-Solca) (SI)

www.interregurope.eu/hr4all

POLICY BRIEF

Slovenia

SUMMARY

Obesity has become a significant health challenge in the Region Pomurje with over approx. 25.7% of the population affected by obesity compared to the average of Slovenia of 19.5 %).

DEVELOPMENT CENTRE MURSKA SOBOTA

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1. Introduction to the Obesity challenge in Europe

Obesity is a major health and social problem. In Europe, 59% of adults are obese. Obesity is recognized as a multifactorial disease which increases the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Furthermore, it is recognized that obesity also impacts mental health (55% higher risk of depression).

The proportion of obese adults in the partner countries is according to WHO (2019).

DK	NL	ES	SLO
50%	50%	54%	58%

Obesity also causes costs for society placing a strain on healthcare & social resources.

- Spending in Europe of €70Bn annually (estimated) for healthcare & productivity loss due to obesity. This stands for approximately 2-4% of the total health expenditure in Europe (European Commission 2023).
- Addressing obesity requires participation of many different sectors. To ensure a holistic approach a variety of practitioners and stakeholders across the partner countries will be involved in the project.

2. The regional challenges of obesity in the Region of Pomurje

Since Slovenia became independent in 1991, Pomurje has been one of the least developed and most deprived regions in the country. It also has the highest rates of unemployment.

The Region's health and lifestyle indicators are also among the worst in Slovenia. This can be identified in different factors such as:

- Sick leave per year: Pomurje residents spend an average of 16.5 days on sick leave per year. This compared to the average of Slovenia which is 14.4 days.

- Lack of physical activity: 23 % of the region's residents are not physically active or engage in light physical activity. Here the average of Slovenia is 18%.
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- The body mass index indicates a high prevalence of overweight or obesity in Pomurje (62.2% of the population has a body mass index over 25), placing it among the regions with the highest obesity rates in Slovenia, with data correlating with general and socio-economic indicators. This also aligns with data on physical activity, where only 11% of the region population meets the WHO's recommendations, which is only half of the Slovenian average. Obesity has a direct and indirect impact on health in Pomurje, which is below the Slovenian average. Diseases directly attributable to alcohol are present in 2.2 per thousand of the population in Pomurje, compared to the national average of 2.0 per thousand. There is also an above-average number of recipients of diabetes medications, blood pressure medications, and blood thinners. Among residents aged 35–74, heart attacks occur more frequently (Pomurje 3.5 per thousand, national average 2.1 per thousand), as do cases of stroke (Pomurje 4.2 per thousand, national average 2.6 per thousand). The poorer health status in the region is also reflected in indicators of healthcare use (curative examinations and hospitalizations).

The Pomurje region has also been facing challenges related to migration and health. This results in social and health inequalities between Pomurje and other Slovenian regions. Studies in Pomurje revealed that the Roma ethnic group is the group that stands out when looking at the indicators compared to the majority population. Particularly striking is the large proportion of smokers, a low level of physical activity and a greater proportion of people with obesity.

Existing policies have not adequately addressed the specific needs of these groups based on e.g., age, sex and ethnicity.

To improve health indicators and reduce inequalities in Pomurje, new cross-sectorial approaches are needed, with a particular focus on vulnerable (obese, migrant) populations.

3. Policy Instrument

Pomurje Regional Development Programme 2021-2027.

Considering the severe social and health challenges faced by the Pomurje region in the last decades, the region was one of the first in Slovenia to put health on the regional agenda as a

development opportunity. The vision of the Regional Development Programme for Pomurje 2021–2027 is “Healthy Pomurje 2030”.

The aim of this program is to activate the required regional potential 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 program supports 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

3.1 Status policies

Currently, the Regional Development Program lacks integrated and articulated measures and interventions across sectors capable of improving the health of Pomurje’s citizens, reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases, obesity and minimizing productivity loss due to disability, and reducing mortality rates.

Hence, there is a need for focusing on these issues and implementation of a range of interventions to improve the health status within the region.

3.2 In HR4ALL

Within HR4All, the region is looking to incorporate new measures and initiatives in the policy instrument to reduce health inequalities, improve health, obesity and well-being through economic development, promote healthy and active ageing, labor market in rural areas, and foster cross-border cooperation on health.

Drawing inspiration from successful experiences of the other partner regions in HR4All, we aim to develop a new project financed by the region to promote mental and physical health of the Pomurje citizens, with a specific focus on the rehabilitation part and the inclusion of individuals facing obesity and vulnerability.

We expect to achieve this goal based on the experiences shared by the different regions involved in HR4All project. Experiences such as how to improve the access to healthcare services, mental health support, vocational training, and social integration programs will play a crucial role in helping us reach our goals.

3.3 How will we do it

As such, we aim to revise the policy instrument, aspiring to plan specific measures to improve the axes 'Healthy natural, social and economic environment' and 'Healthy food and a vital rural areas– tackling health inequalities in local communities, improving inclusiveness and interdisciplinary rehabilitation, promoting nutrition and physical activity as well as new cross-sectoral approaches to health and development.

By addressing the unique challenges faced by vulnerable populations, we seek to improve their active participation in the community and enhance their overall well-being. We will strive to engage stakeholders from various sectors, such as social services, healthcare providers, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions.

3.4 Conclusion

By working together, a comprehensive support system will be established, offering a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and promoting sustainable development for the citizens facing obesity and vulnerable citizens.

The project will ultimately promote an inclusive and supportive community where vulnerable citizens have equal opportunities for rehabilitation, personal growth, and social integration.

With these proactive approaches in mind, we aim to improve our policy instrument, making it better prepared to provide comprehensive support, promote healthier behaviors, improving social inclusion and encouraging integration in active life, ultimately leading to better overall health and productivity outcomes for the citizens of the region.

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This policy report will be updated again latest in Semester 6 (2027).