

Annex D



SUBLIME SDGs LOCAL MAPPING Stakeholders, Challenges & Opportunities Črnomelj, Border town in Slovenia Environmental responsibility and local climate actions

Municipal profile

The **Municipality of Črnomelj** is located in the southeastern part of Slovenia. It extends over 340 km² and in terms of surface area ranks 5th among Slovenian municipalities. The Municipality of Črnomelj is part of Bela krajina, in which Črnomelj is also the center of the municipality itself. The altitude of the town is 174.3 m. The town lies between two rivers, Lahinja and Dobljučica. According to the population census from 2022, 14,310 inhabitants live in the municipality, of which 7,251 are men and 7,059 are women. The number of population over 18 years of age in the municipality is 11,507. The youth population under the age of 18 is 2,703, and between the ages of 18 and 30 is 1,588. Compared to the year 2002, the age structure tends towards the aging of the population, as there are more adults and the elderly than children and young people. According to the census of the population of different religions in Slovenia, 77.8 % are Christians, of which 73.4 % are Catholics, 3.7 % are Orthodox and 0.7 % are other Christians, 18.3 % are of no religion and 3.9 % are other religions. The 2002 ethnic census for Slovenia claims 83.1 % Slovenes, 2 % Serbs, 1.8 % Croats, 1.6 % Bosniaks, 3 % other residents, and 8.9 % unspecified.

The Municipality of Črnomelj strives to create a stimulating economic environment for entrepreneurship, which will ensure adequate conditions for sustainable business and enable the implementation of existing activities in a more sustainable way.

Environmental challenges

Preserved nature is a strong capital of Bela krajina and at the same time a development opportunity for tourism, recreation and leisure. Among other things, it provides a whole range of ecosystem services, namely improving air and soil quality, mitigating the effects of heavy rainfall, protecting water resources and providing raw materials. Despite the preserved nature, there are some problems that originate from the last century, namely in the 1980s. The Iskra Semič factory caused an ecological

disaster when it dumped waste containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into Karst sinkholes. As a result, the Krupa River, a key water source in Bela krajina, has become the most polluted river in Slovenia and unsuitable for water supply. The biogas plant in Črnomelj also causes a lot of concern, especially because of the stench of the slurry, which is said to contain heavy metals. In the protected areas of Bela krajina, they want to preserve animal and plant species and habitats that are rare or endangered. The Bela krajina is included in the Natura 2000 network, namely the rivers Kolpa, Lahinja and Dobljica with their tributaries, the larger forest areas of the Bela krajina are also included. Areas, important for nature conservation, have the potential for the development of sustainable tourism, for the promotion of an active and healthy life in nature, for a better understanding of the sustainable development of the ecosystem and the increase of knowledge and its upgrading with innovative approaches. In Bela krajina, a landscape specialty is a litter with eagle fern, which is home to white birches, many plant species, fungi, butterflies and birds. Special features are also reflected in the images of Karst caves, sinkholes, biotically diverse forests and water. The emphasis on flora and fauna is on dormouse, cave organisms, beaver, otter, orchids, mushrooms and aquatic life. A special place is occupied by Jalžić's congeria, which is the only cave shell in Slovenia, and the white and black proteus.

Awareness on sustainable development and climate crisis

The level of information and awareness about sustainable development in Bela krajina seems to be increasing in recent years, but despite everything, many challenges remain, which is why there are programs and initiatives at the level of local communities and educational institutions that promote sustainable practices. However, general awareness among the population can be uneven, so it is important that even schools devote some words to this topic. The local increase in average temperatures affects changes in the natural environment, including the phenology of plants and crops. In summer, the temperature can rise even above 35 degrees Celsius. The most risky and climate-changing areas are the Kolpa river and its banks, which are sensitive to changes in the rainfall regime, as too much water can lead to flooding and clogging of sewers and also reduce the availability of drinking water. One of the sensitive areas is also the Karst terrain in Semič, where changes can lead to a decrease in water resources.

Local climate actions

There are local cleaning campaigns and volunteer initiatives in Črnomelj and its surroundings, which focus on cleaning nature, recycling and raising awareness among residents about the importance of environmental protection.

In the Municipality of Črnomelj, the necessary infrastructure is being developed, such as smart charging stations for electric vehicles and arrangements for renting bicycles. Although these investments are planned on a smaller scale, they contribute positively to reducing the traffic load within urban settlements. Various educational activities on the importance of reducing emissions in the atmosphere are aimed at different target groups, from children to senior citizens. The local authorities are mainly concerned about the deterioration of the quality of underground water in

certain locations, the chemicalization of the soil, which is also questionable, and the stench, which a large part of the town Črnomelj complains about. The Municipality of Črnomelj is also calling for subsidization of companies, which will give preference to those focused on green activities.

Voices from Črnomelj

As part of the SUBLIME Project efforts to address SDG 13, a survey has reached over 300 respondents across ten border towns and islands in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. The survey aimed at assessing border local communities' perceptions of key issues related to the 2030 Agenda, specifically focusing on the climate crisis.

Key findings in Črnomelj include:

- **Exposure to climate risks:** 80% of respondents reported exposure to environmental and climate-related risks, such as fires, floods, pollution, and extreme weather conditions. Among these, almost 30% described themselves as feeling 'very exposed'. However, in the 18-30 age group, more than 20% reported feeling 'not very exposed.'
- **Perceived seriousness of climate change:** On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents 'not at all a serious problem', and 10 means 'an extremely serious problem', the average score given by respondents was 8, reflecting widespread recognition of the magnitude of the climate crisis. The result is higher - with an average of 9 - when considering the young people.
- **Lack of personal action:** Despite of this awareness only the 50% of respondents have taken a personal action to combat climate change in the previous six months.
- **SDG 13 prioritisation:** About 60% of respondents did not rank SDG 13 among the top five goals requiring urgent action, highlighting the need to elevate climate action within local priorities.

