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Introduction

Dear partners,

The prospect of the Study Visit to Krško is now very close. We will meet at the beginning of March to explore this territory together, share our perspectives, and collectively deepen our reflections within the framework of the HARET project. This meeting will constitute another important step in our collaborative work, following the initial discussions held in France.

This document offers a concise overview of the main demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the areas you will discover during this visit. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a shared framework for better understanding local dynamics and the challenges these areas face.

As during your visit to France, where we presented the contexts of Brittany and the Pays de la Loire, we now offer you a perspective on the Slovenian regions of Gorenjska and Posavje, where the initiatives we will explore together are situated. These two territories present contrasting profiles: Gorenjska, a more densely populated and economically dynamic western region, and Posavje, a more rural eastern region facing more pronounced demographic and socio-economic challenges.

The territory of Krško, located in the Posavje region, provides a particularly interesting example for our project. Simultaneously an industrial town—marked notably by the presence of major energy infrastructure—and a rural area structured by the Sava Valley, Krško lies at the crossroads of several dynamics. The Posavje region has approximately 75,000 inhabitants, with a population density below the national average. Like the rest of the country, it is experiencing a marked aging of its population and a negative natural increase, partially offset by a positive net migration.

These demographic changes are occurring within a national context characterized by moderate growth, a low birth rate, and an increasing reliance on immigration to maintain the working-age population. In this context, Slovenian territories are being led to rethink their models of attractiveness, reception, and development, reconciling economic competitiveness, social cohesion, and ecological transition.

Slovenia also stands out for its strong commitment to sustainability. The country is developing a tourism model focused on quality, the preservation of natural resources, and a "slow tourism" approach, fully integrating sustainable development goals into local practices. This long-standing

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sensitivity to the protection of natural spaces and the promotion of a high quality of life is central to understanding the local initiatives we will discover in and around Krško.

By combining these demographic, economic, environmental, and social dimensions, this document aims to foster comparisons between our European territories engaged in similar initiatives of rural revitalization, hospitality, and transition. It also seeks to establish a common framework for understanding the issues addressed throughout the HARET project: territorial attractiveness, welcoming newcomers, social cohesion, sustainable development, and local resilience.

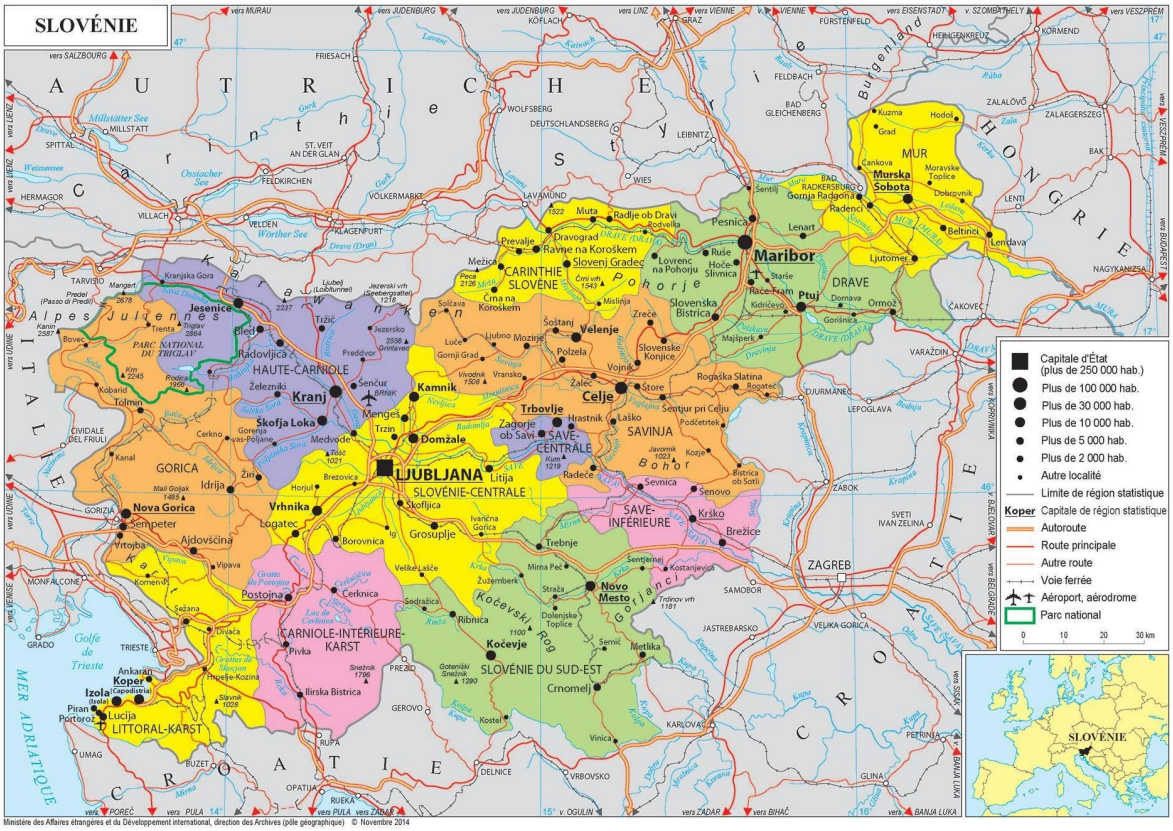
We look forward to continuing these exchanges in Krško, getting as close as possible to the actors and initiatives that are shaping this territory.

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In Slovenia, there is a strong ambition among local communities and stakeholders to support the ecological transition.

Over the past 30 years, Slovenia has experienced modest population growth, primarily driven by immigration. Key challenges include a low birth rate, a rapidly aging population, and an increasing reliance on immigration to maintain a sufficient workforce. These trends pose significant socio-economic challenges for the country's future.



Between 1995 and 2025, the Slovenian population increased from approximately 1,991,106 inhabitants in 1995 to an estimated 2,117,762 in 2025, representing an increase of about 126,656 people over three decades. In 1995, the birth rate was 9.5 per thousand, reflecting a decline compared to previous decades. This downward trend continued, reaching 8.0 per thousand in 2023. The death rate remained relatively stable, rising from 9.5 per thousand in 1995 to 10.2 per thousand in 2023, with a slight increase in recent years.

Since the mid-1990s, Slovenia has experienced a negative or near-zero natural increase (the difference between births and deaths). For example, in 2023, the natural increase was -4,551, indicating more deaths than births. The fertility rate has remained below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. In 1995, it was 1.29, peaking at 1.64 in 2021, before falling back to 1.51 in 2023.

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Net migration played a crucial role in population growth. Immigration, particularly from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, offset the natural decrease, contributing to the slight increase in the total population.
Life expectancy has improved significantly, rising from 73.74 years between 1990 and 1995 to 80.31 years between 2010 and 2015. This increase reflects progress in public health and living conditions. Slovenia is facing marked demographic aging. The proportion of the population aged 65 and over increased from 20.14% in 2018 to an even higher proportion in 2023, while the proportion of young people under 14 has decreased.

Presentation of the Gorenjska territory

Slovenia is divided into two main regions: Eastern Slovenia and Western Slovenia, each with distinct geographical and economic characteristics. Western Slovenia, which includes the Gorenjska region, is more developed and primarily focused on service industries. In contrast, Eastern Slovenia is less densely populated, with an emphasis on agriculture and industry.
The city of Kranj, located in western Slovenia about 20 kilometers northwest of the capital, Ljubljana, is the urban center of the Gorenjska region. With a population of 56,700 spread over an area of 151 km², Kranj ranks third among the largest municipalities in Slovenia in terms of population. Its population density is 377 inhabitants per km², which is significantly higher than the national average of 104.4.
The Gorenjska region boasts one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, at 3.6%, compared to Slovenia's national rate of 5.6% in January 2023. This region is renowned for its high level of development and offers a favorable economic environment, particularly in the manufacturing, trade, hospitality, and transportation sectors. Gorenjska is not only an economic hub but also one of Slovenia's most popular tourist destinations, thanks to its diverse natural and cultural offerings. Tourism plays a central role in the regional economy, generating significant revenue and creating jobs in various sectors, including hospitality, services, and transportation. The region's strategic location between the Slovenian capital and the neighboring Alpine and Italian regions makes it a prime destination for tourists interested in active holidays, cultural exploration, and outdoor experiences.
Growth in national economic activity has helped to expand employment opportunities, although a shortage of skilled professionals remains, particularly in fields such as construction, healthcare, social care, IT, transport and catering.

Presentation of the Posavje territory

The Posavje region, located in eastern Slovenia, covers an area of 968 km^2, making it the second smallest region in the country. In 2022, it had a population of 75,749, representing approximately 4% of the Slovenian population. Posavje's population density is 78.2 inhabitants per km^2, lower than the national average of 104 inhabitants per km^2.
The average age of Posavje's residents is 44.6 years, slightly higher than the national average of 43.9 years. The proportion of the population aged 0 to 14 years is 14.8%, just below the national average of 15%. Conversely, the proportion of people aged 65 and over is 22.2%, which is 0.9 percentage points above the national average.

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In 2022, the region experienced a natural population decline, with a negative natural increase of 310 people. However, positive net migration resulted in a total increase of 154 people, representing a growth rate of 2 inhabitants per 1,000.
For comparison, the city of Kranj, located in the Upper Carniola region, is the third largest municipality in Slovenia in terms of population, with 56,700 inhabitants spread over 151 km^2, representing a density of 377 inhabitants per km^2, significantly higher than that of Posavje.

In January 2023, the unemployment rate recorded in Slovenia was 5.6%, a decrease of 1.3 percentage points compared to January 2022. However, the Posavje region had an unemployment rate of 7.0%, higher than the national average, indicating persistent employment challenges in this area.
Posavje's economy is based primarily on the following sectors:

- Manufacturing industry: This sector constitutes a significant part of regional employment, with a concentration of companies specializing in industrial production.
- Commerce, catering and transport: These activities also play a crucial role, supported by the region's geographical position and its transport infrastructure.

This economic structure is similar to that of Upper Carniola, where these sectors also dominate.

Tourism: a strong dynamic built around a high-quality image

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, approximately 6.2 million arrivals were recorded in 2023, totaling 16.1 million overnight stays. In 2020, 37,000 people were directly employed in the tourism sector, with the food service industry being the largest employer. The tourism sector alone generated approximately €1.72 billion in revenue for Slovenia, representing 2.7% of its GDP and about 2% of all international tourism receipts in Southern Europe.
According to the Slovenian statistical office, during the first three quarters of 2024, the number of tourists increased by +7.2% compared to the same period in 2023. This increase illustrates the growing appeal of this destination, which is now the 8th most visited country in Southern Europe, after Greece.
Tourism activities in Slovenia seek to integrate sustainable development goals into their practices. This involves tourism that fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, meeting the needs of visitors, environmental professionals, and host communities.
This desire to establish sustainable tourism stems from a long-standing and strong commitment among the population to preserving its abundant and rich natural resources. Slovenia, and its capital Ljubljana, boasts the highest percentage of green spaces per capita in Europe.
Thus, the country becomes attractive to visitors who reject mass tourism and favor a more thoughtful approach to travel, also known as "slow tourism." Slovenia seeks to encourage less intensive visits and tourist activities spread throughout the year. It is also a prime destination for visitors looking to enjoy a pristine natural environment.

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Immigration in Slovenia: an economic lever in the face of demographic challenges

According to the OECD, Slovenia welcomed approximately 32,000 new immigrants, representing a 10% increase compared to 2021. The profiles of these new arrivals primarily indicate migration for professional reasons (74%), family reasons (18%), and, for a minority, due to humanitarian crises (0.6%). The top countries of origin for the new arrivals are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia.

The number of Slovenian citizens emigrating also decreased by -2%, for a total of 4500 people in 2022. The main destinations for these departures from the country are Austria (35%), Germany (24%) and Switzerland (15%).

In Slovenia, immigration plays a role in supporting the national economy, particularly in the face of demographic challenges such as an aging population and a declining birth rate. Indeed, by 2050, the median age of the population will reach 50, one of the highest in the OECD. The number of working-age individuals is decreasing while the number of retirees is increasing. Consequently, Slovenia is experiencing a labor shortage in various economic sectors, including construction, manufacturing, and services.

According to the OECD, immigrant workers actively contribute to the financing of the Slovenian social protection system. Furthermore, these workers enrich the economic fabric by bringing a diversity of skills, new ideas and entrepreneurial projects, generating new dynamism and wealth for the regions.

Immigration also presents certain challenges, particularly regarding social and cultural integration. To ensure their integration, the challenge is to reduce obstacles such as language barriers, combat discrimination in the labor market, recognize their qualifications, and enable them to acquire new ones.

The HARET project represents a strategic opportunity for rural areas of Slovenia, which face major demographic and economic challenges. As Slovenia experiences rapid population aging and a decline in the working-age population, HARET offers an innovative approach to enhance the attractiveness and welcoming capacity of these regions. By structuring inclusive and sustainable hospitality models, the project fosters both the integration of newcomers—whether migrants, new rural residents, or entrepreneurs—and the creation of local economic opportunities.

In rural areas, where depopulation and labor shortages weaken local dynamics, HARET aims to revitalize economic and social networks. It provides concrete solutions by promoting natural and cultural heritage, developing sustainable tourism initiatives, and strengthening the skills of local stakeholders through tailored training. Furthermore, by incorporating a participatory and intercultural dimension, the project helps to better structure the reception and integration of new residents, thus ensuring greater social cohesion and balanced territorial development. By leveraging European exchange networks, HARET also enables Slovenian territories to benefit from transnational expertise and best practices, thereby facilitating their transition to a more resilient and inclusive economy.

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