

Building Relationship with the Local Community

Sanja Kukmanovic

Fund for Financing the Decommissioning of the Krško NPP
Heinzelova 70a, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
sanja.kukmanovic@fond-nek.hr

ABSTRACT

Effective public communication and proactive community engagement are critical, yet often underestimated, components of safe and sustainable nuclear projects. The intention of this presentation is to demonstrate how investing in the social fabric is not just a regulatory obligation, but a fundamental pillar of long-term operational success and social responsibility in the nuclear field.

As part of establishing the Radioactive Waste Management Centre, the Fund focuses a key part of its long-standing public relations work specifically on building strong relationships with the local community. Building good relations and trust is a long-term process that requires a systematic approach, honesty, and continuity. Trust cannot be established overnight; building it necessitates a considerable investment of effort, work, and dedication.

This presentation will outline the activities conducted by the Fund with the local community, explaining how we have structured and tailored them specifically toward community engagement. The activities are designed with careful consideration for the specificities of the region, the needs of the local community, and the goal of optimizing information dissemination. Given the broad scope of local community needs, our activities are directed toward a diverse range of areas, including agriculture, economy, social welfare, healthcare, education, family farms, and more.

Furthermore, our local community has specific preferences regarding how it receives information. Consequently, effective information transfer requires utilizing a variety of channels (such as websites, social media, traditional media, print materials, and study visits), as well as a suite of communication tools like information centres, and visual, audio, and video materials.

Ultimately, this tailored and multifaceted approach is designed to build the lasting trust and cooperative foundation necessary for the Centre's sustainable operation and integration into the community.

Keywords: *public relations, communication, local community, building trust*

1 INTRODUCTION

The Fund for Financing the Decommissioning of the Krško NPP (Fund) has the obligation to establish and manage the Radioactive Waste Management Centre (Centre) in the Republic of Croatia in accordance with National Strategy and Programme, as well as in accordance with regulatory requirements, IAEA standards and guidelines and best international practice. RWM Centre will include Central storage for institutional radioactive waste (IRW) and disused sealed radioactive sources (DSRS), Long-term storage for Low and Intermediate Level Waste (LILW) from Krško NPP, Administrative building as well as Centre infrastructure: roads, parking bays and manipulation areas. According to the National Programme, the preferred site for the future Centre is the Čerkezovac Military Logistics Complex (MLC) in the Dvor Municipality on the southern slopes of the Trgovska Gora massif.

The National Programme 0 establishes a framework programme of activities for the establishment of the storage facility and provides recommendations regarding the scope of individual key works, as well as transparency, education and public participation. The national radioactive waste, used sources and spent nuclear fuel management system must be organised in a manner that ensures information availability, public education and public involvement, which contributes to a greater understanding of the risks and benefits of radioactive waste, used sources and spent nuclear fuel management. The Centre establishment project is of national importance for the Republic of Croatia and requires a systematic, comprehensive and expert approach. Due to the inherent sensitivity of the subject of radioactive waste management and the prevailing negative public perception, the project must be approached in an appropriate manner, with the aim of informing the public about the project in a professional yet simple way, transparently, and by providing complete, accurate and timely information.

Considering the foregoing, the Fund is conducting a series of informational and promotional activities in the municipality of Dvor, with the aim of engaging and informing the local population, enhancing credibility, fostering connectivity and increasing the level of trust.

2 IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

The local community, although one of the largest in Croatia by area, is extremely small in terms of population and economically disadvantaged. It has only around 3,000 inhabitants, and needs across all aspects of life are insufficiently met. To contribute as much as possible to the development of the community and to enhance the resources that the community will receive from the Centre establishment project, we have been conducting various activities across different areas of the population's life for several years.

2.1 Development Opportunities of the Municipality of Dvor

The development aspects of the establishment of the Centre relates to the improvement of life quality and the creations of opportunities for further economic development of the area. To develop guidelines for achieving progress and maximising the usability of financial support to the local community, the first step was conducting a study on economic development in 2021: "Development Opportunities and Challenges of the Wider Area of the Municipality of Dvor Driven by the Siting of the Radioactive Waste Management Centre in Čerkezovac".

Each year, the Fund directs part of its activities specifically towards improving the living conditions of the local community.

2.1.1 Donations

The Fund started its donations distribution initiative in 2024, allocating almost **€350,000** for **165** projects across three calls for applications over two years. Annual donations are ongoing. The planned amount in 2026 for donations is €220,000.

Donations are awarded to artistic, cultural, educational, training, healthcare, humanitarian, sports, environmental, agricultural, rural and other projects and programmes that promote ethical values and social responsibility, achieve a beneficial impact on the wider social community, and contribute to the welfare and improvement of the quality of life of the social community in the Municipality of Dvor.



Figure 1: Reports on the Allocation of Donations for 2024 and 2025 0

2.1.2 Financial support

At the end of 2025, the Regulation on the Amount of Compensation and the Method of Financing the Local and Regional Self-Government Unit in whose Territory the Radioactive Waste Management Centre is Established or Located was adopted.

The Regulation requires the Fund to pay the full amount of compensation for the current calendar year, amounting to **€1,600,000.00**, into the budget of the local and regional self-government unit in whose territory the Centre is located. Specifically, the Municipality of Dvor will receive 70% of this amount, or **€1,120,000**, while Sisak-Moslavina County will receive the remaining 30%, i.e., **€480,000**. It is important to note that the County must also invest these funds in the territory of the Municipality of Dvor, and the inclusion of the County in this Regulation has enabled the implementation of more demanding capital projects for which the Municipality itself does not have the appropriate administrative capacity. It is stipulated that this basic compensation shall be paid annually from 2026 until the closure of the Centre.

The Regulation also establishes an additional compensation for radioactive waste management in 2026 and 2027. Accordingly, the Municipality of Dvor will receive a cumulative total of **€1,120,000** over the next two years, while the County will receive **€8,480,000**. With these funds, the County will initiate the implementation of capital projects in the Municipality area as early as 2026.

The compensation is paid to the local community for the purpose of encouraging development and improving the quality of life of the population. **The funds are for strictly defined purposes**, and their implementation is monitored by the Ministry of Economy and the Fund.

2.2 Projects in Agriculture

As the first step and in line with the commitment of the Municipality of Dvor to agriculture as a sustainable development direction, the Agroecological Study for the area of the Municipality of Dvor in cooperation with experts from the Faculty of Agriculture in Zagreb was prepared in 2023.

In the last several years Fund is conducting numerous activities in promoting the development of agriculture, forestry and the food industry in the Municipality of Dvor. Activities are conducted in cooperation with the Faculty of Agriculture in Zagreb.

Honey Quality Evaluation

Honey quality evaluations have been conducted since 2024. Through two held competitions, **66** honey samples were collected, of which **63** were awarded, indicating the high quality of local honeys.



Figure 2: Sensory Evaluation of Honey Quality in 2025

Sausage Quality Evaluation

The first sausage quality evaluation was held in 2025, with the aim of encouraging the production of traditional Banija sausage for commercial purposes. A total of **14** samples were submitted, and the Champion sausage was awarded, along with gold, silver, and bronze recognitions.



Figure 3: Sensory Evaluation of Sausage Quality in 2025

Agricultural Workshops

Since 2024, the Fund has organized a series of agricultural workshops for the local community. The workshops covered topics such as the collection and use of chestnuts, mushrooms, fruit tree pruning, and the like. The workshops also included a practical component, during which participants had the opportunity to see how mushrooms are collected or how fruit trees are pruned.



Figure 4: Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop in 2025

Establishment of Chestnut Plantations

In the Sisak-Moslavina County area, there is a traditional cultivation of chestnuts, and the fruit is suitable for use as a raw material for the food and confectionery industry, the processing industry, and the creation of added-value products (flour, chestnut purée, pastries). A particular benefit is evident in the beekeeping sector, as the chestnut provides high-quality pasture for bees, and chestnut honey from the Dvor area is a highly valued product. Therefore, the Fund, in cooperation with the Faculty of Agriculture and Dvor Forestry Office, launched the establishment of a chestnut orchard. During the establishment of the orchard, a total of 60 sweet chestnut seedlings was planted, and 1,000 indigenous chestnut seedlings will be planted during the 2026. The event was attended by representatives of the Fund, representatives of the Municipality of Dvor, members of the management of Dvor Forestry Office, representatives of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb, as well as students and staff of the Dvor Elementary School. The chestnuts were planted by children from Dvor Elementary School.

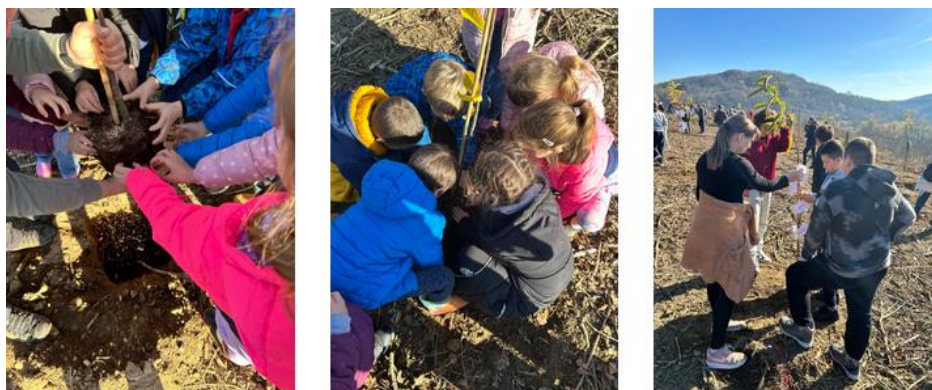


Figure 5: Chestnut Planting in 2025

2.3 Projects in Healthcare

The basis for financing and co-financing projects and activities in the field of healthcare was the Study of Health and Environmental Indicators for Sisak-Moslavina County with an emphasis on the Municipality of Dvor. The study was conducted by the Sisak-Moslavina County Institute of Public Health, and in cooperation with them, the Fund implements a number of healthcare programs in the Municipality of Dvor.

Since 2023, mobile mammography and a colorectal cancer prevention program have been carried out. Through this activity, **364 women** have been examined by mobile mammography over three years, and 71 adults have been tested for colorectal cancer.



Figure 6: Mobile Mammography

Since 2024, the Fund has been supporting of examinations and issuance of sanitary cards as well as hygiene minimum certificates for residents of the Municipality of Dvor. So far around **100 certificates** were financed.

To make mandatory pork testing more accessible and to prevent human illness from this dangerous anthroozoonosis, the Fund co-finances the testing of pork samples from pigs slaughtered for household or family consumption. More than **1000 samples** were tested through this activity.

To determine the health safety of drinking water, the Fund finances the collection of water samples from inland wells in the Municipality of Dvor to conduct microbiological and chemical analysis of the water; and also, the collection of water samples from inland wells in the Municipality of Dvor to conduct microbiological and chemical analysis of the water.

For the purpose of improving the general health status of the population of the Municipality of Dvor, the Institute of Public Health regularly monitors health indicators in the Municipality of Dvor, such as infectious diseases (vaccine-preventable diseases, droplet-borne infectious diseases, naturally occurring anthroozoonoses, intestinal infectious diseases), chronic non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, neoplasms), as well as congenital anomalies, pregnancy terminations, and stillbirths.

Twice a week, the delivery of human samples for human microbiological diagnostics from the Municipality of Dvor has been organized to ensure high-quality diagnostics necessary for the implementation of causal therapy.

A series of lectures was held with the aim of health education to raise residents' awareness of various contemporary diseases and to enable them to act in preventing and combating many diseases, both infectious and chronic non-communicable. The lectures were held at the Info Centre, and the topics included tick-borne diseases, obesity as a risk factor, national preventive programs for early cancer detection, mosquito-borne diseases, naturally occurring anthroozoonoses, the role of proper nutrition in preventing chronic non-communicable diseases, addictions, and allergies and the pollen calendar.

2.4 Projects in Education

Cooperation with Dvor Elementary School

The Fund has established a long-standing cooperation with Dvor Elementary School, and we gladly host students at the Info Centre, organizing various activities and optional trips for them. The trips are tailored to the curriculum and the age of the students. Over **600 pupils** attended these trips.





Figure 7-12: Dvor Elementary School on Field Trips

This year, for the first time, a photo contest for Dvor Elementary School has been organized. Students participate voluntarily, and the contest is called "Dvor Through 12 Months." Over the course of 12 months, we collect photographs of Dvor taken by the students, from which the most beautiful photograph for each month of the year will be selected, and from these, the Fund's calendar for 2027 will be created.

Info Centre Tours for Schools of Sisak-Moslavina County

For the fourth year in a row, the Fund has been organizing guided visits to the Info Centre for schools from Sisak-Moslavina County. The activity is primarily intended for eighth graders, but attendance sometimes includes a wider age range, in which case we adapt the program to suit the age group. Over **350 pupils** visited our Info Centre through this activity.

The typical visit includes a lecture by a guest speaker (young employees of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant), a tour of the Info Centre, animation, and augmented reality games.



Figure 13-15: Guided Visits of Schools from Sisak-Moslavina County

Dvor Kindergarten Visit

In 2025 the cooperation with the kindergarten in Dvor was established for the first time. A visit by the children of the "Sunce" Kindergarten to the Info Centre is planned for Earth Day.

During the visit, the children will listen to a story about environmental protection and draw their own drawings and interpretations of environmental protection.

2.5 Information and Awareness Activities for local community

Throughout the entire duration of the project, a large number of misinformation and false claims have been released to the public, very often with the explicit aim of frightening the population. Nuclear topics inherently carry negative connotations, and fear is an inevitable phenomenon in such projects. The NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) effect is present everywhere in the world, including in our area.

Therefore, it is of great importance for us to provide verified and accurate information, especially to the local population.

2.5.1 Educational Excursions for the Local Community

One of the most effective activities recognized in global practice is certainly public visits to nuclear facilities and radioactive waste storage sites. Given that Croatia does not have an adequate facility on its territory, for several years we have been organizing visits to European nuclear facilities and storage sites for the local population. Through this activity, **86 residents** of Dvor had the opportunity to visit various radioactive waste management facilities and nuclear power plants in Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Austria.

Feedback from the study trips has been extremely positive, and the effect achieved by this activity cannot be measured against other methods of information transfer, as it offers far greater advantages. This way, it is possible to see firsthand what nuclear power plants, storage and disposal facilities look like, to talk with employees, and during most visits, we also organized meetings with representatives of the local communities we visited. The residents of Dvor had the opportunity to talk with them, exchange experiences, and tour the projects they have realized using financial support.



Figure 16-21: Excursions to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Spain, Slovenia, and Austria

2.5.2 Tours of the future Centre's location

After the takeover of the site, there were many public speculations about what was happening at the site and whether radioactive waste was already being stored there. To demonstrate transparency and show the public that the existing storage facilities at the site are empty, from 2023 to 2025 we organized monthly site tours accompanied by Funds employees. The tours were free for those interested and they were able to see the entire site and ask questions of concern to them.

Starting this year, instead of this activity, we will begin holding Open House Days.



Figure 22: Tour of the Location in 2023

2.5.3 Meetings with the Fund's Expert Employees

The Fund's latest activity for the local public is meetings with the Fund's expert employees. The first such meeting was held at the beginning of March, and the organization of three additional such meetings are planned for 2026. Residents of the Municipality of Dvor had the opportunity to talk with the director of the radioactive waste management department and ask questions about the project.

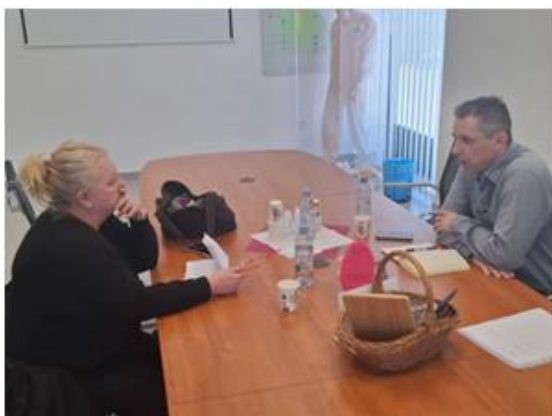


Figure 23-24: First Meeting With the Fund's Expert Employees

3 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

One of the specificities of our local community is the way in which information is received and exchanged. It is a community with a predominantly elderly population that prefers television and radio channels as a means of receiving information. Then there is the younger population, which relies more on social media and the internet, while information sharing through print media is still present as well.

For this reason, we use a range of different communication channels: we record television programs and place them on local TV stations, publish articles in local print media, publish a newsletter, produce brochures and leaflets and use social media and websites. According to surveys we have conducted, word of mouth remains the most important method of information transfer, so we invest significant efforts in personal communication and organizing various meetings and face-to-face activities.

3.1.1 Info centres

The cornerstone of the Fund's public information efforts is certainly our Info Centres. The Fund has established two Info Centres: The Info Centre on Radioactive Waste in Zagreb, located at the Nikola Tesla Technical Museum, and the Info Centre on Radioactive Waste in Dvor. The emphasis in information activities, however, is on the Info Centre in Dvor, which has been visited by over **2,600 visitors** since its opening in 2022.



Figure 27-28: Info Centre in Zagreb

The purpose of the Info Centres is to convey accurate and verified information in an easy-to-understand manner tailored to visitors of different ages. The exhibits are interactive and show the path of radioactive waste from its generation to storage, and ultimately to disposal. In addition to models of the storage facility and a cross-section of the Čerkezovac site, we also have VR goggles with a film showing the path of radioactive waste in a Dutch radioactive waste management company, augmented reality features and augmented reality game, as well as a number of graphic displays and informational brochures on the topics of radioactive waste management and the establishment of the Centre, as well as radioactivity in general.



Figure 29-30: Info Centre in Dvor

The Info Centre in Dvor is also the central venue for all workshops, visits, and all sort of activities for children. Children especially love our mascot, Waste-Eater, a cute little green monster that eats radioactive waste. However, since Waste-Eater does not actually exist, our job is to explain to the public how it is really done.



Figure 31: Waste-Eater

3.1.2 Web pages and social media

The main information channels through which we disseminate up-to-date information about the project are the website and social media.

The Fund has a corporate website, which we use for basic information about the Fund and information of a technical nature. In addition to the corporate website, we also have the Centre's website, which serves to inform about the Centre establishment project and through which we publish all news regarding the Centre establishment project.

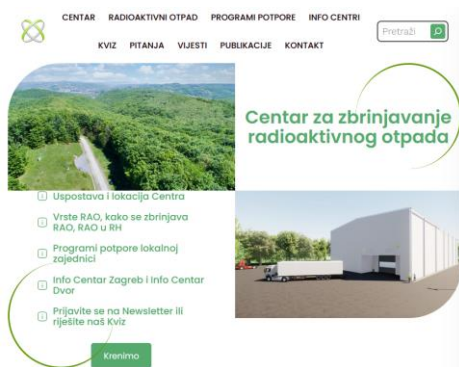


Figure 32: Centre's Web Page: www.czrao.hr

Among social media platforms, we use Facebook, which has proven to be the most relevant in our local community, as well as YouTube.

Through Facebook, we publish all information about the project and our activities, and we enable two-way communication with the public. We respond to messages and comments as soon as possible and provide accurate and verified information in our communication. We have strict rules regarding the manner of communication and do not tolerate insults or incivility. We respond to both positive and negative comments and encourage constructive discussion.

Through YouTube, we publish video content, animations, and recorded shows, depending on the phase of the project and the public's interest in a particular phase.

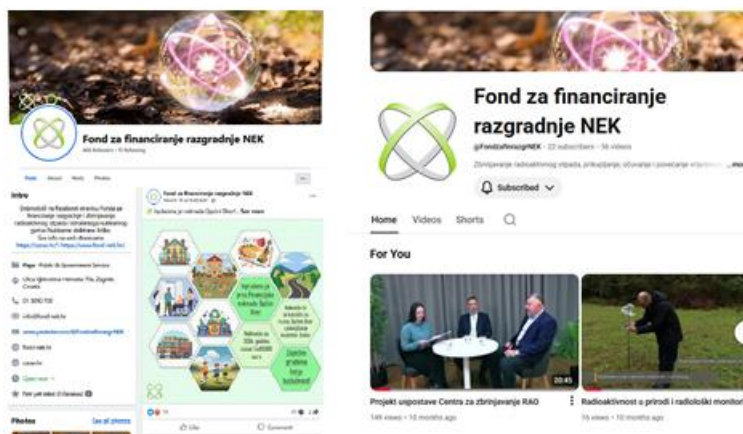


Figure 33-34: Centre's Facebook and Youtube Page

3.1.3 Newsletter

Since 2021, we have been publishing a newsletter monthly. The newsletter includes a summary of activities for each month, and we publish it on the website, distribute it to the mailboxes of residents, through the Info Centre, as well as through several businesses, public companies, the Municipality, cafes, and similar places.

3.1.4 Other publications

To convey information in a visual, effective, and clear manner, we produce a range of different publications such as brochures, leaflets, infographics, animations, and the like.

All research work at the site was accompanied by recordings, photographs, and animated displays of individual works, and last year we produced an animation of all planned facilities at the site, complete with a floor plan and a sketch of the entire site.

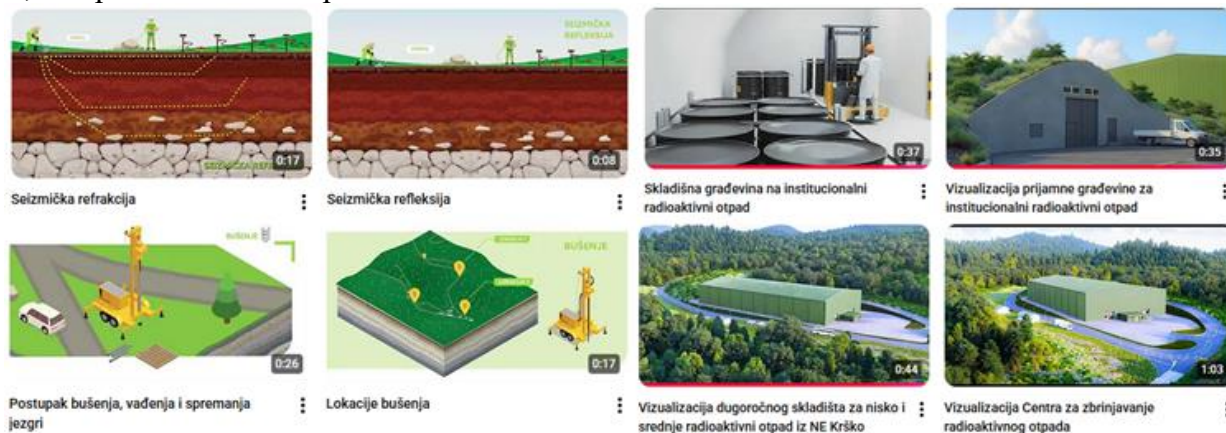


Figure 35: Animations of Research Work

Figure 36: Animations of Future Centre

3.1.5 Media

In every sphere of our lives, including nuclear field, the media plays a very important role. We regularly communicate with the media, providing them with summaries, announcements, news, and comments on articles. We are open to collaboration and often give interviews, appear on shows, and respond to inquiries about the project and the Fund. We gladly respond to calls for collaboration, and this year we are also planning a study trip for journalists with the aim of bringing the topic of radioactive waste management closer to the journalists who cover us. This is a very complex topic that needs to be made accessible to journalists so that they can convey information to the public as clearly and accurately as possible.

4 CONCLUSION

Effective public communication and proactive community engagement are critical, yet often underestimated, components of safe and sustainable nuclear projects.

As part of establishing the Radioactive Waste Management Centre, the Fund focuses a key part of its long-standing public relations work specifically on building strong relationships with the local community. Building good relations and trust is a long-term process that requires a systematic approach, honesty, and continuity. Trust cannot be established overnight; building it necessitates a considerable investment of effort, work, and dedication.

By using a diverse range of communication channels—including social media, websites, newsletters, brochures, television, radio, and direct personal contact—the Fund has adapted to the specific needs of the local community, ensuring that all age groups receive clear, accurate, and timely information.

Ultimately, this tailored and multifaceted approach is designed to build the lasting trust and cooperative foundation necessary for the Centre's sustainable operation and integration into the community.

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