

## **Together for the Karst: A Green Footprint for the Future**

**On Earth Day, April 22, volunteers from the ranks of UniCredit Bank employees came together and dedicated the day to restoring nature and helping the community affected by one of the worst natural disasters in the last decade.**

In the vicinity of the Cerje monument, where the Karst landscape is still severely damaged after extensive fires, 70 volunteers from the ranks of UniCredit Bank employees planted as many as 750 seedlings and scattered several bags of seeds of indigenous species. This is part of a wider effort to restore burned forests in the Karst - an area that is the heart of Slovenia's natural heritage and an important protective belt against erosion and drought.

### **The Karst fires - a wound to nature and the community**

The Karst fires of 2022 were the largest in the history of independent Slovenia. The fire, which raged for several days, destroyed more than 3,600 hectares of forest and undergrowth, threatened settlements, cultural heritage and required enormous efforts from firefighters, volunteers and local residents. The fires left behind a bare, wounded landscape that will take years to rebuild.

### **Forest restoration – a natural shield and a long-term solution**

Restoring burned areas is a key part of the recovery process. Native tree species such as black pine, oak and maple provide a long-term source of soil stability and prevent erosion, retain moisture and help improve the microclimate. Fires not only destroy trees, but also sensitive soils, which is why quick and thoughtful action is essential.

*"Every tree we plant today is a step towards a more resilient landscape tomorrow," said Matej Kravanja, a representative of the Slovenian Forest Service, who helped guide the volunteers with his colleagues. "The help of companies like UniCredit Bank is extremely valuable – not only because of the planting itself, but also because of the example and awareness they spread among employees and the wider society."*

The restoration of the forest near Cerje was not only an ecological, but also an important social action. Working together, socializing and being aware that we are leaving something for future generations connect people in a special way. In gratitude for the support shown, Mauricij Humar, Mayor of the Municipality of Mirje, presented the representatives of UniCredit Bank with a plaque as a symbol of gratitude and encouragement for further cooperation.

*"Such initiatives are an important part of a broader strategy of action, which does not end at the office desk, but begins where the community needs help the most," said Boštjan Rupar, Member of the Management Board of UniCredit Bank, who accepted the plaque on behalf of the company.*