



OUR FOOTPRINTS IN THE WORLD

2021 activities of VUB Bank
in ESG areas



VÚB BANKA

FOR ALL THAT COUNTS

INTRODUCTION

We are a green bank aware of its impact

The world is changing and in 2021 we got to feel it again a little more significantly. The ongoing pandemic and the resulting new rules to protect both health and economy, more specifically formulated challenges and global strategies in the face of the climate crisis or advancing digitalisation are undoubtedly trends that affect each of us. As a bank, together with our foundation, since our establishment we have placed a strong emphasis on the footprints our activities leave behind in the world that we are a part of. We have always been striving to respond to the current needs of the society.

However, what used to be a matter of decision or choice is nowadays - in the third decade of the 21st century - already becoming a necessity. We at VUB, inspired by the experience and results of our parent group Intesa Sanpaolo in promoting sustainability, are fully aware



Photo: Alexander Resch, CEO of VUB Bank, signing the Green Manifesto

of this and therefore as a matter of natural evolution we are taking our social responsibility strategy to the next level. We can no longer measure the success of our operations as a financial institution only by the performance figures and the level of satisfaction of our shareholders and clients. Our overall impact on the world around us is becoming the key aspect. And it can be defined in three directions - how we impact the environment (Environmental - E), how we treat not only our clients, but also employees, communities and society in general (Social - S), and last but not least, how responsibly we approach our own governance (Governance - G).

We want to do our best at all these levels. For the past 2 years, we have been intensively working on shaping our strategy in the ESG areas. This also resulted in our concrete shift, when we were the first bank in Slovakia to publicly declare our [Green Manifesto](#), by which we have already permanently inscribed the principle of sustainability into the very DNA of our business. The entire last year was marked by fulfilment of this commitment, which we, as the VUB team from all over Slovakia had set out. Another public step was part of our path - within the Slovak Banking Association we became one of the main initiators of the Memorandum on Sustainable Business and Development, by which we are joining forces across banks and state institutions in the spirit of the ESG idea.

Our effort to be a relevant and simultaneously transparent bank for the planet and society is truly sincere. We will let you judge for yourselves whether we are doing well in this. We believe that also this overview of the most important activities and projects that we engaged in during 2021 in the ESG areas will help you to get to know us a little better.

VUB Bank did not elaborate the Non-Financial Statement for 2021 in accordance with the requirements of EU legislation on non-financial information and used the exemption provided by the regulation as a subsidiary, the information about which is included in the consolidated non-financial statement submitted by Intesa Sanpaolo SpA.

GREEN & SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

In VUB, we believe that responsible behavior really brings a chance for a greener future. We are convinced that our main role as banks, is to leverage our know-how and the realm of finance, in which we operate. We want to bring solutions that drive green economy and at the same time we want to invite also our clients to engage in these activities. This is why our strategy for green and sustainable financing is extremely important to us.

WE OFFER THE MOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTING IN GREEN FUNDS

Investing through a bank is an increasingly used option for appreciating your personal savings. The most significant growth in the volume of investments is recorded by the so-called ESG funds.

This is due to the fact that more and more people are already beginning to notice how companies treat the environment, society or their employees. And this influences not only their shopping behavior but also their personal investments.

As a green bank, we offer the most ESG funds in Slovakia for investments in demonstrably sustainable global companies with the highest green rating.

This is enabled to us through our direct connection with **Eurizon**, a global asset management group. VUB is the first and only bank in Slovakia to make its investments through this system, which is the European leader of management companies with operations around the world and which belongs to our parent group Intesa Sanpaolo. When we first offered ESG or green funds with the support of Eurizon Slovakia back in 2020, this was already a strong trend abroad. We are glad that the interest in them is growing in Slovakia as well, and they already account for 39% of all mutual funds at VUB. This is the proof that people want to invest more and more in companies meeting the strict ESG criteria and thus contribute to a better future.



Photo: Petra Polnišová in an advertising campaign for the Green Funds

If you decide to direct your finances through the bank to such marked funds, you can be more confident that they will be appreciated in a commercial environment where sustainable, responsible and ethical business and behavior are considered to be the core values.

We are proud to have had in the long-term [the widest portfolio of ESG funds among the Slovak banks](#), and at the end of 2021 we opened another special fund, which also enabled us to receive several additional bonuses. The new mixed ESG fund Responsible Portfolio represents a domestic alternative to the foreign ESG funds and we recommend it mostly to those of you who have already had some experience with investing. After the first year, you do not pay any exit fee, and if you can invest your money for a longer period, you will not have to include the yield paid out in your tax return, it will automatically be deducted by the withholding tax.

What are our criteria for selecting companies for ESG funds?

From the environmental point of view, we examine the environmental impact of companies, monitor whether they are reducing their carbon footprint, water consumption in the production process or how they approach waste reduction or recycling. The "social" part focuses on how companies manage their relationships with employees, clients. Protection of employees does not pertain only to occupational safety, but it is a rather wide range that is monitored, such as observance of the principles of equal remuneration for the work of men and women. The last part involves "governance", where the experts monitor transparency in the company's management or its anti-corruption procedures.



Photo: VUB Bank as the general partner of the Green Buildings' Week

WE WERE THE FIRST TO BRING A GREEN MORTGAGE

As we set it out in our Green Manifesto, the year 2021 was marked also by new green banking products. We were the first bank in Slovakia to decide to support residential and corporate clients that are building or renovating in accordance with a low-energy standard with a more convenient mortgage.

We are convinced that it is good to motivate each other to a more ecological lifestyle. And it is precisely through the green mortgage that we want to make this decision financially easier for our clients at home. When creating its conditions, the first thing we had in mind was that we as a bank wanted to bring a solution clearly associated with the word "savings". Taking a responsible approach when building or reconstructing a house using green technologies, we undoubtedly save the planet's resources including our health. However, this effort is also worthwhile due to the financial savings that can be reflected in the family budget in a few years' time.

If you decide to finance through the bank a construction or reconstruction with installation, e.g. of photovoltaic cells, solar collectors for water heating, biomass boilers, or you want to live in a passive house with energy certificate A, at VUB you will receive for this purpose a green mortgage completely free of charge. At the same time, the higher value of a low-energy and sustainable building means the possibility of obtaining a higher mortgage or a more advantageous rate. We have big plans with this product and we will keep improving it in connection with the expected new standards and certifications in this area.

In 2021, we translated our efforts to facilitate the clients' transition to the green economy principles also into the first product for institutions that invest in sustainable projects. We brought an investment loan with a convenient interest rate of up to 0.3% for companies and local self-administrations, if their projects meet the circular economy criteria, are focused on the use of renewable energy, incre-

asing energy efficiency, or their goal is sustainable management of natural resources, land use or biodiversity protection.

The criteria for this loan were specified in collaboration with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a global leader among the institutions driving circular principles in the economy, which is a strategic partner of our international banking group Intesa Sanpaolo.

We Have Supported Green Economy Development with EUR 5 million Already

As a bank, we have been striving to be active in the field of green economy and renewable energy sources for several years now. Since the first announcement of support for alternative production sources, we had a strategy in this type of financing in place. Over the past decade, we provided loans worth almost EUR 5 million for implementing green technologies in practice. Nearly half of them were construction mortgages. More than 20% of loans went to acquisition of energetically passive real estates. The share of our financing in the field of renewable sources, especially photovoltaic power plants, is the highest in the market. In the corporate segment, we are number one with a market share of approximately 20%.



Photo: Signing of the Green Manifesto at VUB Bank

Since July 2021, updated internal rules within our credit policy began to apply at VUB Bank, which put the concept of financing in accordance with the ESG principles in the first place. They set even stricter rules in which cases the bank provides finance and in which, on the other hand, lending is excluded. The key criterion is the extent to which the projects we finance contribute to reducing CO2 emissions and energy consumption and what their impact on the environment, climate, natural resources and human health is.

WE ARE A STRATEGICALLY OF GREEN RENOVATION OF BUILDINGS

Did you know that residential buildings or office buildings were by far the largest consumer of energy in Europe? Almost 50% of final energy consumption in the EU is used for heating and cooling, of which 80 % is used precisely in buildings. Their impact on the environment and the stock of natural resources is really enormous. Reducing consumption of buildings and the related emissions is therefore becoming one of the first and foremost solutions in combatting the climate change. And we have the ambition to play a significant role in this area in Slovakia.

According to the so-called Low-Carbon Development Strategy elaborated by the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, renovation of buildings and ecological design represent in our country the most economical and also the most effective measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Also the recovery plan approved by the government identified green renovation of buildings as a priority for the green economy, which will allocate to this agenda in Slovakia EUR 741 mil. from EU funds by 2026. In order to improve the energy efficiency of family houses, non-refundable financial assistance in the volume of more than half a billion euros should be distributed from this amount over the next five years. According to VUB's analysis, the funds from the Recovery Fund will be able to cover the renovation of approximately 30,000 family houses, which represents



Photo: VUB Bank became the general partner of Green Buildings' Week

only three percent of their total number in Slovakia. Similar situation applies also to the amount of funding allocated in comparison with the total investments needed in the buildings sector.

The space for further funding of the necessary green renovation of buildings is therefore large and involvement of banks in this agenda will be considered crucial. We at VUB Bank have taken up this challenge from the very beginning. Already last year, we started cooperating as the **key partner with the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic in the preparation of a new banking product that will enable co-financing of clients** in addition to the state subsidy from the Recovery Fund for low-energy renovation of family houses in Slovakia. We have thus defined our bank's key challenge for the coming years. We are confident that in this way we will be able to participate with our share in the overall purpose of the European Green Deal and thus contribute to the long-term common goal of carbon neutrality of our country and the continent as well.

In July last year, we confirmed our intention to be the leading bank in Slovakia supporting the construction of buildings based on sustainability also **by entering into a partnership with the Slovak Green Buildings' Council (SKGBC)**. This platform associating a total of 58 professional institutions, is the main ambassador in this area in Slovakia and our alliance with it allows us to be at the root of the current events, trends, legislation and public awareness in the topic of constructing 21st century planet friendly buildings.

In this connection, in September, we were **for the first time also part of the World Green Buildings' Week event**, which was organized by the SKGBC in Slovakia for the 11th year. As a general partner of the series of events on sustainable construction, we contributed to the professional discussion also with our expertise and provided an overview of how Slovak banks can contribute to the financing and implementation of green solutions in buildings construction as well. The Green We take our role of active participation in professional dialogue and co-creation of real solutions for green building renovation

We Reward Architecture that Protects the Environment

In recent years, the topic of environmental responsibility in construction and architecture has taken root and it has been also gaining prominence in public appreciation within this industry. The best known initiative of its kind in Slovakia, the CE ZA AR award, which is announced by the Slovak Chamber of Architects and which draws attention to the social value of buildings and works, adopted in 2021 as its main motto "Green for Architecture". Also we at VUB want to support actual deeds and constructions that contribute to a higher quality of life and a better environment. This was the reason why we decided to support the idea of rewarding experts in this field and became the general partner of the 2021 CE ZA AR award.

really seriously. And another such opportunity for us is **also the 2020 Manifesto initiative, which we partnered with last year as well.** We are pleased that in this context, in addition to other leading figures in the field of architecture, we have managed to sit at the same table with our friends from Nová Cvernovka, with whom we have had a long-term partnership through our foundation.

One of the main points on the agenda of the 2020 Manifest platform is to transfer to Slovakia the principles and mechanism of a new initiative of the European Commission, which got the title **the New European Bauhaus.** It is a Europe-wide vision that defines innovative rules and direction in architecture so that new and refurbished buildings in Europe help reduce the carbon footprint as much as possible. We are simply fascinated by this unique approach, which

combines modern technology, architecture, art and aesthetics with the values of sustainable development. As a green bank in the coming years within the team of signatories and professional organizations associated under the 2020 Manifesto, we want to draw inspiration and simultaneously help with solutions that will bring the idea of the New European Bauhaus into reality by financing the sustainable and aesthetic renovation of buildings in cities around Slovakia.



Photo: A view of the Nová Cvernovka building

OUR SUPPORT FOR THE PLANET AND PEOPLE

VUB Bank is the second largest bank in Slovakia. We are fully aware that our position comes with responsibility not only in the area of provision of services to clients and sustainable management of financial resources. We want VUB's footprints to be fully visible beyond the world of banking - in many other areas where our impact on the planet and society can be reflected, also through our responsibly distributed support.

Environmental Section

WE AWARD THOSE WHO MADE PROTECTION OF NATURE THEIR TOP PRIORITY

Nature conservation has always been of great importance. And since 2021 it will already have its prize. As a green bank, we launched a pilot year of the Atlas initiative - environmental award by our VUB Foundation to those who protect Slovak nature. Our public tribute and award materialized in the form of a fragment of a wooden circle was presented symbolically on Earth Day to six winners, according to the decision of the expert jury.



Photo: Petra Csefalvayová from INCIEN was a juror of the ATLAS Environmental Award

We are proud that, in cooperation with renowned experts, we managed to create a new platform that has the potential to once again raise the crucially important issue of sustainability and nature conservation in our country. The aim of our Atlas Environmental Award is to give space to leaders in this field in Slovakia to inspire others even more and have the motivation to continue what they started. We are very pleased with the success of the premiere year. As many as 177 people responded to our call to participate in the nominations of projects implemented in 2020 - from non-profit organizations, civic initiatives, through municipalities, schools, eco-startups, to businesses based on the green economy principles.

The key role in the whole initiative was played by five experts involved in various areas of environmental protection, who sat on the expert jury. They decided on the award winners in six defined categories, four of which, in addition to public recognition and media attention, received a grant contribution for their further activities. In overall, VUB Foundation donated a total of EUR 40,000.

This award is becoming our tradition for the future. We presented the Atlas Award winners in an original way - through a special document, which was premiered on Earth Day, on April 22 on VUB Bank's social networks, and was later broadcast on Dvojka national TV channel [You can also watch it here.](#)

These Are the First Atlas Award Winners

In the inaugural year, we presented the Atlas Awards in six categories, focusing on protection and promotion of biodiversity, climate change and air protection, environmental awareness and education as well as eco-start ups. Awarded were also projects of a local self-administration and a company operating on the green economy principles.

- In the biodiversity category, the **Slatinka Association from Zvolenská Slatina** won the award for its unique, long-term work, which resulted in preventing the construction of a dam and saving a valley full of life.
- Also the **Climate Needs You** initiative received recognition for organizing the largest online petition in the history of Slovakia, aimed at resolving the climate crisis.
- The winner of the awareness category was the **Centre for Environmental Activities in Trenčín** for its project of young environmental reporters, which excels in active and direct involvement of pupils and students in finding out the causes as well as consequences of environmental problems.
- The **sobi. eco** project became the award winning one from among the eco-startups, which employs disadvantaged people in sheltered workshops and produces usable and modern ecological products based on the principle of circular economy.
- The best project of the local self-administration was submitted by the **municipality of Kladzany** in the district of Vranov nad Topľou, which started retaining rainwater from the municipal buildings and has been preserving it for the periods of summer heat waves.
- In the green economy category, the Atlas Award was granted to **JRK Slovakia** for its innovative technology for monitoring production of waste from doors, which can help local administrations make effective decisions in the field of waste management immediately after its implementation.

We Stand with the People of Slatinka - the story about how they saved the river valley needs to be spread

The valley of the river Slatina near Zvolen is one of the last preserved upland mountain valleys with a meandering river in Central Europe. Thanks to the diversity of the species of its animals and plants, its natural value is incalculable. Also despite this fact, a "sword of Damocles" had been hanging over it for many years. The threat of its disruption due to the construction of a dam was finally averted by the local Slatinka Association in 2020. The story of immense effort, courage and perseverance of the local people deserves recognition from the entire Slovakia. We are pleased to be able to help telling their story as well. The Slatinka Association became one of the winners of the first year of the Atlas environmental award of VUB Foundation.

Our award brought the association a prize of EUR 10,000. In Slatinka, however, they also made a beautiful gesture in this connection. They will allocate a part of the money to repairing the local bridge during the summer and they selflessly donated up to EUR 6,000 to three other organizations that reached the finals of the environmental award and have been also fighting for nature conservation in their locations.

You can read more about saving of the green heritage of the village of Slatinka, its past and also future in an interview with the award-winning activist Martina Paulíková, which was published in VUB Foundation's online magazine [Srdcovky](#).



Photo: Slatinka Association won the Atlas award in the Biodiversity category

WE DISTRIBUTE GREEN GRANTS

The possibilities to obtain resources for ideas coming from the third sector addressing the ever-disappearing biodiversity in nature or promising models of social entrepreneurship driving sustainable development in the regions of Slovakia, are still relatively limited. Our system of Environmental Grants enabled eight non-profit organizations and initiatives to receive a financial injection for the second year in a row, enabling them to revitalize their green projects in 2022.

Our grant program Environment Grants and hand in hand with it also the Atlas environmental award have become a fundamental pillar of our VUB Foundation's work aimed at systematic support of the efforts of ecology-focused non-profit organizations in the regions of Slovakia. We are delighted that in 2021, for the second time, we could distribute through our locally unique grant scheme another EUR 50,000 to organizations and people in them who have the plan and determination to work step by step on the much needed green changes in the world around us.

We have set the rules of the Environmental Grants program in cooperation with top experts in the field of sustainable development and environmental protection, who also take care of the independent selection of the most effective solutions among the submitted projects. Last year, a total of 98 entities participated in the grant call having presented a total of 70 projects aimed at protecting our nature and 28 proposals contributing to the development of green economy in the regions of Slovakia. The expert commission selected 8 organizations, each of which received at the end of 2021 from VUB Foundation the support of up to EUR 7,000.

During these months, the following can start their change-bringing ideas: **Rodová Ekofarmička Irija** (Čierne Kláčany, Zlaté Moravce district), **Záchranná stanica and Ekocentrum Záživá** (Dolný Kubín district), **BONA FIDE, o.z.** (Košice), **Bratislava Regional Conservation Association** (Bratislava - Podunajské Biskupice), **Pre Úľany - Pro Fude-**

mus, n.o. (Pusté Úľany, Galanta district), **OZ SaUvedom** (Trnava), **Aevis n.o.** (Poloniny National Park) and **Cyklokoalícia** (Bratislava).



Photo: VUB Foundation supporting the Environmental Projects already for the second time

Fruit Already Borne by Environmental Grants

VUB Foundation's dedication to the environment is like a mosaic composed of many stories. These projects, which succeeded in the pilot call and were successfully implemented in the past year, also testify to the importance of supporting green community initiatives through the Environmental Grants program.

- In Vinosady under the Carpathian hills between Pezinok and Modra, thanks to the obtained grant, they started planting special alleys. Their trees can be adopted by the locals and they become a kind of "ancestral" trees. The significance of this act for the future also lies in the fact that the new greenery will not only humidify and cool the air, but also protect the homes of the inhabitants from gusts of wind and floods. Last but not least, the alleys of fruit trees will also bring a reward in form of rich home-grown harvest.

- In the municipality of **Utekáč** in the **Poltár** district, a space where the long-term unemployed are given work was created. Activists from the civic association **OZ kRaj** combined beekeeping, glassmaking and traditional **Gemer** craft, the so-called honeycombing. The Honeycomb Processors project combines social entrepreneurship with ecology - beeswax is filled into cut recycled glass containers. This original workshop also operates thanks to the support of the Environmental Grants.
- **The Garden of Memories in Zvolen** is a place where non-traditional last farewells and natural burials take place. This unique project is run by the non-profit organization **Živica**, which received a grant to finance the expansion of the cemetery area by creating a new blossoming meadow. The place is enlivened by a rich habitat for many organisms and a peaceful retreat for the bereaved.
- The children from **Narnia Primary Grammar School in Petržalka**, Bratislava are learning to live in harmony with nature. To bring life back to the school yard, the children's parents created islands of biodiversity there. In various parts of the yard, natural playgrounds, rows of fruit trees, a gazebo, a sensory pathway and a composting site have been created. Children have butterfly meadows and bird houses in the yard and they even retain the rainwater.
- Activists from the civic association **OZ MYesto** transformed the dilapidated ice cream parlour in the centre of **Žiar nad Hronom** into the BÚDA eco-centre, which is also opening up to the **Žiar** community. **BÚDA**, whose ecological recovery we supported from our Environmental Grants, is a civic response to the ongoing climate crisis and, above all, it aspires to motivate people to lead a sustainable way of life.

You can find all the stories about these supported projects also in our Srdcovky magazine.

WE SUPPORT AWARENESS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AMONG CHILDREN

As a green bank, during the last school year we became a part of a unique educational project entitled "For a Better Future of the Earth". Children in schools and at home could learn in an interactive form about how to behave more ecologically in life and also how to build a relationship with nature and take care of our planet. The initiative counted 150 schools and 10,000 students and teachers from all over Slovakia.

The ongoing pandemic and the development of distance learning gave rise to a variety of engaging online courses designed for playful education of children. One of them included the idea of the Eduvision agency, which, in cooperation with climate and environmental experts from the civic association **OZ EUROARCH**, launched an awareness-raising campaign among the primary school pupils on highly pressing topics. The "For a Better Future of the Earth" project educates about nature conservation, introduces the topic of climate crisis and explains how it affects our lives and how each of us can help our planet. At VUB Bank, we did not hesitate for a moment and supported this idea.



Photo: Education "For a Better Future of the Earth" running in schools ;

The course is designed for pupils from the 4th to 7th grade of primary schools and can present an excellent complement to environmental education, natural science lessons or social sciences. Presentations, videos, interactive games and quizzes are suitable directly for teaching, however they can also be used for individual tasks at home. The great advantage is that, thanks to our support, the course was available to everyone free of charge. In the first phase, 10,000 unique users joined the online platform - mostly children, their parents and teachers. We keep our fingers crossed for this meaningful project also in the future, we believe that it will manage to inspire many more children to save the planet.

We strengthened our support for the "For a Better Future of the Earth" project also by donating prizes to the accompanying competition, which put a symbolic end to the first phase of this educational project. More than 500 children took part in the competition. The children could get involved with their drawings and show how they see with their own eyes the saving of our planet. Pupils from Trstena, Stará Ľubovňa and Dolný Kubín took the first three places.

We Sponsor Podcasts Opening up Green Topics

The state of the environment, climate and green solutions - from the systemic to everyday ones - need to be discussed. As a green bank, we also see our role in being the voice for these topics in the online world as much as possible. Therefore, we also teamed up with podcast creators. We brought a series of podcasts on hot environmental topics, produced with the support of VUB, as part of the [Klímapodcast](#) format of the SME daily newspaper. As a green bank, we also participated as partners in the preparation of interviews brought by the greenfluencer Michal Sabo as part of his podcast Sabo Sebou (Being Myself). You can find the recordings in the archive [on the Expres radio website](#).

WE HELP BIODIVERSITY RETURN TO TOWNS

Greenery not only makes towns more beautiful, but also plays an important role in them. In summer, it protects them from overheating, improves air quality and brings with it various forms of life - birds, small mammals and vital insects. The return of biodiversity to the world around us is a goal that runs through our entire grant efforts, but in the metropolises of western and eastern Slovakia, we even decided to enter into special partnerships with this intention.

Since the end of 2020, through our foundation, we have been involved in a major revitalization project in the capital - making the decades-long neglected **Prüger-Wallner Garden** available to the public. We managed to complete our grant support dedicated to the restoration and protection of the natural heritage of this forgotten locality in the heart of Bratislava, which has already reached a total of EUR 100,000, in June last year. Together with the municipality representatives, we have opened this area for big and small visitors. It is not just such an ordinary piece of greenery. The slightly rugged terrain is grown with ancient trees while the lowest part of the area is waterlogged with rare wetlands. These are unique for this location and enrich the biodiversity of the wider centre of Bratislava. Although the garden is located near the Mountain Park, from a natural point of view it has a completely different character and offers new opportunities for family and community activities.

As the main partner of the revitalization, we first participated in the clearing of the roughly overgrown and inaccessible area. And we contributed not only financially, but also with our own hands thanks to our colleagues - volunteers from the bank. With the support of VUB Foundation, natural, wooden sidewalks, bridges, info boards, new trees, flower beds and a natural children's playground were added to the garden. The works are still ongoing and a community eco-center should be set up in the renovated historic house and greenhouses. However, the initiative to restore the Prüger-Wallner Garden was not the first green partnership project with the capital's management.

Two years ago, we supported tree planting from the VUB Foundation's resources within the "10,000 trees for Bratislava" project. pre Bratislavu."

Come and Take a Relaxing Breath in "Prügerka Garden"

The garden at Bratislava's Calvary was once the property of the successful Prüger family, who had a villa built here before World War II. However, after the war they left Bratislava and over time, the land became the property of the town. Meanwhile, more than 70 years passed, during which the garden became desolate and a waste depot. However, all this is the past today and the PrügerWallner Garden begins to write its new story. The unique natural garden is now fully available to all - open for walks, picnics or games or experiential learning for children. Opening hours and program are published at the www.prugerka.sk website.nájdete na stránke www.prugerka.sk.



Photo: Thanks to the support of VUB Foundation, a park in Nová Cvernovka was created from rubble. Source: Michal Líner

In late November, we shifted our attention to the east and joined the Košice Tree Adoption project, which is backed by the Municipal Greenery Administration in Košice. In the park and inter-block areas in the Luník VIII housing estate, we thus supported the planting of up to 55 mature trees, which will turn green this spring. As a symbolic adoptive parent, we covered not only the planting of new tree alleys and complex landscaping, but also the care for new trees for the next 3 years in a busy locality of Košice with EUR 22,000. These are the most critical years for taking root and the life of a tree.

Ecological Sutopark Built in Nová Cvernovka

Our closest allies in the non-profit sector has included the Nová Cvernovka team in Bratislava since 2017, which, in addition to its main agenda, has also paved the way for active education in the field of sustainability. When community activities subsided during the second wave of the pandemic in this largest cultural and creative centre in Slovakia, the volunteers started creating a public park on their premises. The material for its construction was created by a unique processing of the building rubble, which remained here after the reconstruction of the former school building and the liquidation of which would otherwise have been highly uneconomical and especially unecological.

We were also the ones who supported the construction of a new public "Sutopark" based on the principles of the circular economy, with additional funds in the amount of EUR 30,000 from VUB Foundation. In the exterior of Nová Cvernovka, not only specially fortified sidewalks were created, new trees were added, but also a unique hill was created, the so-called "Living Wall" that revives the habitat of this environment thanks to a number of new plants, meadow herbs and shrubs.

You can read the entire report from the visit to Nová Cvernovka, which provides an overview of how Sutopark was created, in our [Srdcovky](#) magazine.

WE STAND WITH MEDICAL STAFF AND BUSINESSES ALSO DURING THE PANDEMIC

Also this year, VUB responded promptly to the needs of society as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. We tried to help as effectively as possible at a time of rapid and constant changes and problems during the crisis that has been reaching deeper and deeper into all areas, be it healthcare, economy or the lives and health of us and our colleagues.

Healthcare staff in all hospitals around Slovakia worked at the limit of their strengths and possibilities. They were fighting the time, lack of doctors, nurses and, unfortunately, many times also human prejudices, hostility and aggression. Despite exhaustion, they persevered in saving lives in an ongoing fight against the pandemic. The situation in the hospitals was bad, especially towards the end of the year, and was a huge strain on the psyche of the healthcare staff. Therefore, VUB Bank, in cooperation with the largest Slovak radio stations Expres, Jemné and Europa 2, decided to create a new initiative and we set up a **Thanksgiving Line** to show jointly doctors and the healthcare staff that they have our support. At the toll-free line 0800 00 77 77 anyone could leave a short message for the healthcare staff and thank them for their devoted work, or upload it to the web in the form of an audio or video greeting. The initiative included also a gift for hospitals throughout Slovakia in the form of coffee, coffee machines and radios where they could listen to the messages.

Also in 2021, we stood by the **#KtoPomozeSlovensko** initiative and participated in the activities of one of the largest civic initiatives aimed at helping the Slovak healthcare system since the very outbreak of the pandemic. VUB Bank, in cooperation with well-known faces and media partners, helped create a TV spot on behalf of the initiative, which aimed to send a thank-you and encouraging message to Slovak healthcare staff.



Photo: Thanksgiving Line is another initiative of VUB Bank for supporting healthcare staff

The management of VUB Bank unanimously supports vaccination as the most effective, scientifically proven solution in the fight against the pandemic, which is why we actively participated in the nationwide **#zaockujemsa** initiative. As an employer, we found it also very helpful to be able to use a number of well-prepared materials of this online platform in our internal communication. The first wave of the internal vaccination campaign was launched at the end of February, and more than 55% of the bank's employees had already been vaccinated within 4 months. We supported the vaccination also in cooperation with the mobile vaccination unit, which was visiting our branches throughout Slovakia and was available to VUB employees and their relatives as well. We consider continuous education and open communication essential. Therefore, we created a live section on this topic in the bank's internal information system and we also organized for our colleagues several lectures with experts such as MUDr. Ivan Bakoš from the Institute of Vaccination and Travel Medicine and also the founder of the Data without Pathos initiative, the analyst Ivan Bošňák.

Our Help to Colleagues Who Overcame Covid-19

Throughout the year, we were looking for ways how to lend a helping hand to our colleagues, not only in preventing the disease but also after its overcoming. In addition to providing a discount on PCR tests before the summer holidays or arrangement of post-vaccination tests (IgG antibody test as well as blood clotting risk test), we also provided for a comprehensive examination in order to detect any potential consequences of the disease as soon as possible, which included spirometry as well as laboratory tests. We helped employees who had overcome covid and had heavy symptoms and consequences also by refunding to them a spa treatment in the Tatranská Kotlina sanatorium.

Just like in the field of healthcare, the pandemic has left a deep scar also in the Slovak economy. Information on covid subsidies and pandemic state aid for entrepreneurs is very comprehensive, and many companies have difficulty understanding it. Therefore, we decided to join the digital initiative **the Assistance Compass** for entrepreneurs, businesses and individuals. Due to a great interest and the deteriorating economic situation, this tool was continuously supplemented with new information and functionalities, such as webchat and communication via Facebook. Thanks to the financial support from VUB, a call centre, which helps many people with their financial problems has been added.



Photo: The vaccination initiative #Zaočkujemsa

We Also Stood by Local Producers at the Good Market

The Good Market (Dobrý trh) has long been one of the largest community events in Bratislava, which offers space to honest and fair small producers from all over Slovakia, non-profit organizations and initiatives and, last but not least, whole families of neighbours from around the market. Although the year 2021 was also marked by pandemic restrictions, we managed to maintain a partnership community cooperation between the civic association OZ PUNKT, the market's organizer and VUB Foundation. We brought a special program to the online space, thanks to which fans of this idea could continue to support their favourite local producers. They were able to do so also in person, at the spring issues of the Good Market, which were held in the spirit of promoting slowness in enjoying life as well as community co-existence.

WE CONTINUE HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE

The willingness to help the weak, the disadvantaged or the youngest is a value that many people around us still carry in their hearts. We have felt our mission in this regard for many years and charity and partnerships with active non-profit organizations in this field continue to be an important source of the energy, which drives us forward as a brand.

The Good Angel (**Dobrý anjel**) system helps with regular monthly allowances to families with children where the father, mother or child is suffering from cancer, or the child is struggling with another insidious disease, and the family is therefore in financial need. VUB Bank has been a partner of the Good Angel since 2007 and we are proud to have been **the largest angel company in Slovakia** for a long time. From among the non-profit sector initiatives that help people

in need, we have had the longest and strongest alliance with this organization. We are the first and so far the only bank to create a major source of financial support through Maestro Dobrý anjel debit card payments. At the same time, it does not cost the clients themselves anything at all, and we pay the amount from all monthly card payments from the bank's own resources. This currently represents 0.2% of the payments made, which means that with a total of more than 65,000 angel cards, in 2021 VUB Bank sent to the families of cancer patients as much as EUR 350,000.



Photo: VUB Bank continues to support sick children thanks to the Good Angel organization

The For Hope program of VUB Foundation is also a strong pillar in helping disadvantaged and challenged people around us. In 2021, for this purpose, we distributed nearly EUR 40,000 among several partner non-profit organizations that have their experts and have had many years of experience in this field. We are delighted that we could be part of assistance in the rehabilitation of severely physically handicapped children through **the Association of Assistance to the Disabled - APPA**, we supported the solving of a hot issue of "housing first" for homeless people in cooperation with the civic association **OZ Vagus**, we also contributed to the **Blue Angels (Modrý anjel)** crisis intervention team to expand the training of specialists assisting victims of tragic events and their relatives. And last but not least, we also teamed up with the **Society of Friends of Children from Children's Homes Smile as a Gift (Úsmev ako dar)** and helped bring a merrier Christmas to families in a very poor social and financial situation and to single-parent children.

So That Thumbelina Babies Would Feel Like Inside the Womb

Malíček (Thumbelina) is a civic association of parents of premature babies, which strives to improve the care of premature babies in Slovakia and their families. We are glad that thanks to the support of VUB Foundation, a volunteering project could be carried out, which was connected with production of hand-crocheted "bedspreads" intended for special incubators. Their task is to protect the children placed inside of them from light and other environmental influences, creating thus a safer environment for the babies. Supportive and enthusiastic the volunteers created also soft crocheted toys - octopuses, which are supposed to remind the baby of touching the vitally important umbilical cord.

WE PROTECT THE ART OF PAST AND ALSO FUTURE

The art, whether in the form of historical heritage or the modern way of self-expression of new generations of artistic talents, has had an irreplaceable place in society everywhere around the world. We are proud that VUB Foundation is one of the largest supporters of the preservation and development of art among corporate foundations in Slovakia.

In 2021, we continued to support the completion of the restoration of **Calvary in Banská Štiavnica**, one of the rarest cultural monuments in Slovakia under the UNESCO protection, which was removed from the list of the 100 most endangered monuments in the world also thanks to us. After 14 years of our efforts and funds donated to the civic association **OZ Kalvársky fond** in the amount of almost EUR 1.5 mil. this historic gem is almost reconstructed indoors and outdoors, the majority of work is completed and the unknown Calvary has

become a world-class monument, which is visited by more than 100,000 visitors a year. The growing importance of Calvary was confirmed also by the Slovak Post, which issued a stamp with the motif of the Upper Church on Calvary in the volume of 180,000 pieces. Last year, the award granted to us by the town of Banská Štiavnica was a great satisfaction for us, expressing the VUB Foundation gratitude for its long-term support of the Calvary and also other projects in its territory.

Our voting competition **Treasures of Slovakia**, focused on the restoration of Slovakia's cultural heritage, is already a well-known initiative to the public. VUB Foundation has been contributing to raising awareness of the condition of historical monuments in our territory and



Photo: VUB Foundation contributed to restoration of recently discovered Gothic frescoes at Uhrovec Castle

helping to restore monuments in a damaged or desolate condition through this competition. It is specific in that the fate of the nominated monuments is decided directly by the citizens of Slovakia. In 2021, already the 12th edition was held and the voting was decided from among 9 historical works that had been selected by an independent commission of experts from nearly 270 objects nominated this year from around the country. The public and enthusiasts from the regions decided with their more than 41,000 votes and a grant of almost EUR 45,000 went this time exceptionally to two finalists that had undergone a balanced duel - the parish of the Roman Catholic

We Helped to Revive Precious Frescoes

Uhrovec Castle, which dates back to the 13th century, is a national cultural monument. It contains a mix of Romanesque, Renaissance, Gothic and Baroque-style reconstructions. Among its administrators was also Matúš Čák of Trenčínansky, yet it was the longest owned by the Zay family. There are many rarities in the castle that are worth saving. One of the interesting elements is, for example, the Romanesque chapel from about 1245, which is unparalleled among the Slovak ruins. It is precisely this castle chapel that contains the unique Gothic frescoes that have gained the attention of the public and won financial support for restoration through our Treasures of Slovakia competition. The civic association, which has been restoring the castle, also received another award - Phenomena of the Time in the CE ZA AR architectural competition. According to the jury, the reconstruction presents an example of exemplary approach to the monumental restoration of the common historical heritage.

We took a closer look at what was happening at the castle and we are bringing you a report about it in our [Srdcovky](#) magazine.

Church in Stará Ľubovňa for the restoration of the Baroque pulpit in the church of St. Nicolas and the civic association OZ Uhrovec Castle with the aim of restoring Gothic frescoes in the castle. VUB Bank has been long involved as a supporter of contemporary Slovak art. In cooperation with its foundation, it annually organizes **the art competition Painting - VUB Foundation's Painting Award to Young Artists**. We give young artists the opportunity to present their work, we present new talents to experts and the art community as a promise of Slovak fine arts and we enable the general public to get

to know the best that has been created in our country in the field of painting in the given year. In 2021, we organized already the 16th annual competition. Besides being recognized by the international expert jury, the winners again received a financial reward in the total amount of EUR 20,000. The competition is connected with an exhibition of artworks by 20 finalists in the Nedbalka Gallery, which introduces young Slovak art to the public. We made it available also in virtual form through [our website](#).



Photo: Ivana Mojšová with VUB's CEO Alexander Resch at the Nedbalka Gallery



Photo: VUB Foundation cares about protecting and preserving our cultural treasures

WE SUPPORT FINANCIAL EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG AND ADULTS

There is an instant association between the words bank and money. It is our duty to manage the clients' money responsibly. It is our interest to provide financial services that offer people money when they need it. And it is our mission to talk about the fact that money needs to be handled reasonably so that we could be better prepared for the future as a result.

Through our online entertaining financial education project, we help to expand the clients' skills and knowledge so that they can make the right decisions about their financial resources. By means of videos, reviews, quizzes and games, this method of teaching supports the economic and financial literacy of both adults and teenagers. Eight educational sessions cover topics ranging from budget to savings, from investment to new types of financial technologies. Their content was created in cooperation with the initiative of our banking group Intesa Sanpaolo, which, thanks to its Savings Museum in Turin, is one of the largest organizers of various educational and leisure activities in Italy for all age groups of children and adults.

Managing personal finances is one of the basic skills that needs to be developed already at an early age. Parents should play a key role in this. We also strive to assist in developing financial literacy, even with the youngest children. Even in the context of the pandemic situation and limited opportunities to communicate with schools directly, for the second year in a row we found the way and in cooperation with the popular children's educational and entertaining magazine **Bublina** we brought a comic about why and how children should learn to save. Children can learn in an engaging way and with ready-made games about, for example, the basics of what makes up a family budget, what the relationship between work and pay is, or what to do when they get their own pocket money.

Financial literacy is increasing also thanks to the colleagues from the bank, who give lectures on this topic at primary and secondary schools, and at universities specialized in economics and finance. For those who need advice or get quickly oriented in the world of finance, there is also our contact center, which is available to clients 24 hours a day.



Photo: Internal educational activities at VUB on the topic of financial education

WE LEND OUR HANDS FOR A GREENER AND BETTER WORLD

We are convinced that in any area that we set out, we need to start with ourselves first. And in case of our green and socially beneficial agenda, which we, as a bank, spread in the world around us, this holds even more true. As employees, we are its first ambassadors. In doing good, we all need to push for the same end in order to see the meaning of what we are doing, and for our help to be targeted. And we are glad that we, as a team of more than 3,500 colleagues, are really doing well in this respect.

Environmental Section

TOGETHER WE CLEAN UP AND REVIVE NATURE

Corporate volunteering has had a long tradition at VUB Bank. In recent years, we have been heading in a clear direction in this area - out into the nature, where we can leave behind a piece of something that will make it cleaner. and healthier. Naturally, we were adapting our activities with colleagues to the pandemic situation over the past year. When it was impossible to be together, we helped the nature individually. But the joint result was still worth it.

With the coming spring, we first organized our **cleaning challenge connected with walks in the nature**. All that the colleagues needed to do was to take bags and collect everything that does not belong in nature and share a photo with the result of their work in our internal group on Facebook. We immediately followed up on this challenge and decided to partner with the civic association OZ Upracme Slovensko (Let's Clean Up Slovakia) initiative as the main partner. The result was our three-week event **#upratujemdoma** (cleaning up at home) in April. Its mission was clear – to declutter the home from everything we don't need anymore and no longer makes us happy. And it wasn't just about cleaning at all. The point of the challenge was mainly to motivate people to learn how to sort waste properly and to think beforehand if they can find any other, new use for it before it ends up in the container. In order to keep our combined burden on the planet as low as possible with this event, with the experts from this field we also prepared some practical instructions and tips together. We were publishing them continuously on our social networks, while every week we dedicated ourselves to cleaning and sorting different things, e.g. clothing, old cartons, plastic, medicines, oil, electronics or bulky waste. We do know that nothing is better than a good feeling, but we still rewarded the most active colleagues with useful gadgets that make ecological behavior at home easier.

The end of May was marked by the so-called **Green Days** in cooperation with the Bratislava City Hall, during which we organized several works for colleagues from the Head Office, connected with waste collection, removal of brushwood or protection of rare plants. After long months of working from a home office, we combined the pleasant with the useful, having rolled up our sleeves, did a great deal of work for the nature and had a great time with friends from work. In total, almost 100 volunteers from VUB participated. Our steps were directed to various locations - Prúger - Wallner Garden near the Mountain Park, the surroundings of the Croatian branch in Petržalka, the surroundings of Devín Castle and also to the floodplain forests - Soví, Pečniansky Forest and Hrabín.

It was precisely in these protected forests polluted by black dumps on the Petržalka's side of the Danube that we intensified our cooperation with the city of Bratislava even more and we also invited the public to join in the cleaning. On our own initiative, we arranged bags, gloves that

anyone could take and use during the walks. We also took care of the construction of temporary stands for bags with collected waste and in cooperation with the city organization OLO and experts from the company NATUR-PACK - we also arranged its disposal, separation and analysis.

In Protected Forests of Bratislava We Collected 340 kg of Waste

A joint large cleaning event of volunteers from our bank and the Bratislava City Hall unburdened the floodplain forests on the Petržalka side of the Danube by 340 kg of waste.

The result of the event we initiated as an idea and organized at our own expense in late spring, is not only a cleaner nature of the protected forests Hrabiny, Soví and Pečnian-sky les, but also the analysis of the collected and sorted waste. This was provided by the NATUR-PACK organization and the city gained an overview of the state of pollution of these natural sites, as well as the data within the setting of rules for depositing beverage containers. We are glad that we managed to unburden the forests a little bit, which are of great importance for Bratislava in terms of biodiversity.

As much as 86% of the volume of collected bags consisted of sortable waste, which can be recycled and/or processed with respect to the environment and which would have polluted the urban forests for decades to come.

In mid-September, we expanded our activities for the most active colleagues again to all of Slovakia - and we covered them under the Green Volunteering Week 2021. We again joined forces with the field organizations that helped us choose the locations where our hands were the most needed – Banská Bystrica Beautification Club, the Bratislava Volunteering Centre, the Center for Environmental Activities

in Trenčín and the TANAP National Park. Thanks to 63 colleagues across Slovakia, we managed for example to clean up sidewalks around the Tatra mountain lakes, unburden another piece of nature within the protected landscape area near the Danube River below the Devín Castle, revitalize a cherry orchard near the Trenčín Castle and also collect more than 100 kg of rubbish in a protected valley near Banská Bystrica, where rare springs and a source of drinking water are located.



Photo: VUB Bank employees helping to remove brushwood during the Volunteering Week

WE GIVE GRANTS TO COLLEAGUES WITH GREEN IDEAS

Last year, for the 15th time, the VUB Foundation brought an opportunity to apply for a grant for community and environmental projects of non-profit organizations, if our colleagues from the bank join them as volunteers. In this way, we distributed EUR 30,000, which facilitated the implementation of up to 20 public benefit ideas during the year.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, people in the regions of Slovakia do not lack interest in beautifying and ecologic reviving of their surroun-

dings, on which they want to work together in their communities. Up to 145 civic associations, schools and municipalities enrolled in the 15th annual employee grant program of VUB Foundation entitled "Help Your Community". People working in various positions in VUB Bank across Slovakia participate in the preparation or implementation phase of projects they submitted.



Photo: VUB Foundation has been supporting an employee grant program called We Support Good Ideas already for 16 years!

According to the expert commission's selection, 20 ideas were given the green light for their implementation, of which up to 16 were directly aimed at developing green volunteering, promoting an active approach to the environment or spreading awareness about biodiversity protection already from the smallest ones. The mosaic of completed activities spreads throughout Slovakia. From spring to autumn last year, projects supported by our grants started in Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Budmerice, Dobšiná, Horná Kráľová (Šal'a district), Košice, Ličartovce (Prešov district), Martin, Medzilaborce, Pezinok, Pribylina (Liptovský Mikuláš district), Rožňava, Senica, Spišská Nová Ves, Svätý Kríž (Liptovský Mikuláš district) and in Trstená. The projects include construction of community gardens or apia-ries, planting of new green oases or orchards, cleaning of water springs, creation of space for experiential learning of children directly from nature and similar initiatives.

Run-down School Garden Turned Into an Open-air Environmental Classroom

At the Pavol Dobšinský Primary Grammar School in Rimavská Sobota, they had their dream come true and our foundation helped them with that. The headmistress, together with a team of teachers, decided to breathe new life into the large, unused garden, joining forces across the whole community. They designed the garden to become a place of relaxation and an inspiring space for teaching various subjects. They involved in the designing also children, through a competition for the most beautiful plan.

Today, the new oasis of relaxation also serves for practical education and formation of one's own opinions in the field of environmental education. Pupils can plant their seeds here and watch them germinate and grow. Together with adults, they also built insect hotels and birdhouses. The school managed to revitalize older fruit trees and plant many plants in order to lead children to reduce the negative effects of climate change.

Also this story can be found in an article that we prepared for the Foundation's magazine [VUB Srdcovky](#).

WE GET MOTIVATED TO ECOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR IN MANY WAYS

Promoting the sustainability principles is becoming an increasingly natural part of our thinking and functioning in our offices and homes. This is also confirmed by other activities that our colleagues accept with interest and of which they themselves are even the originators.

An example is our **Eco Champions** initiative. Through this initiative we invited all colleagues, specialists in their fields to come up with ideas and solutions on how to specifically and measurably pass our principles declared in the VUB Green Manifesto onto the individual levels and departments of our bank. We managed to create four teams of internal experts who volunteered to help promote environmental principles within the operations of VUB. They address sustainability issues in the areas of internal communication and education, internal processes and operations, as well as our banking products and solutions for residential and corporate clients.

Also thanks to the work and proposal of the Eco Champions, we managed to introduce in our **Head Office** e.g. **binless offices**. In order to motivate colleagues to create less waste, we placed bins for separated waste only in the common areas within the halls and kitchens.

A part of the environmental management of human resources at VUB is also the **support of ecological transport of employees**. Bicycle rental is permanently operational at VUB's Head Office in Bratislava. For colleagues around Slovakia, we installed a total of 85 bicycle stands in front of the



Photo: The newly renovated atrium at VUB Bank's Head Office in Bratislava

bank's branches and provided them with a significant discount on the purchase of electric bicycles. Also last year, we took part in the nationwide Biking to Work (Do práce na bicykli) initiative, which we expanded by including motivation to commute to work using other, more environmentally friendly alternatives – walking, scooter or public transport.

We have a new atrium - a common piece of greenery for all colleagues from the Head Office

Also we ourselves decided to enhance a piece of the world closest to us. Last year, we completed a two-year project for the reconstruction of the atrium premises at our Head Office in Bratislava, during which we also paid attention to its environmental impact. Due to the pandemic, a new atrium was built in several phases.

In phase one, as a team of employees, we joined forces and cleaned the space, in phase two, a large wooden terrace with pleasant equipment was created here. This created a place where we can spend time with colleagues in the fresh air. We plan to further supplement this space full of greenery, e.g. with also an insect house and other elements supporting urban biodiversity.

As a VUB team, we want to motivate ourselves not only to mutual physical activities in the nature, but also to share good advice and tips on how to practically reduce our environmental burden in everyday life. Also in 2021, we prepared internal **educational activities** on various topics, e.g. how to practically sort waste at home and minimize it, or how to buy and create a wardrobe based on principles that are more friendly to the planet. As a bank, we use the know-how of experts from the parent group Intesa Sanpaolo and we invite our colleagues also to lectures and workshops on the topic of circular economy.

Social Section

WE ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS TO FAMILIES IN NEED

In Slovakia, about 200,000 children live in single-parent households. These families have been on the margins of interest for a long time, and what is truly tragic is that during the pandemic and the lockdown, many of them literally reached the threshold of poverty. Single mothers, who depend on a single income, at a time when they are losing it, are struggling not only with financial problems, but also with a strain on their mental health. And the children perceive it all. We and our colleagues are not indifferent to this situation, so we are helping together.

Therefore, besides direct financial assistance from the VUB Foundation for organizations that take care of such children and families, we joined forces and provided our own, targeted material assistance to **abandoned mothers and fathers in the form of individual employee donations**. In cooperation with the donation portal dakujeme.sk, which features verified families and we know exactly where our help is going, we brought stories of families which contained authentic wishes from the children or the needs of their parents three times during the year. And VUB colleagues and their families were given the opportunity to fulfill these many times modest, but ever more coveted wishes.

Before Easter, we decided to **organize a collection of groceries and drugstore items for households in need**. 151 families applied for the help and they found their donors among the "VUBers" within two days. According to the applications, colleagues - individuals or entire teams - chose "their" family and ensured its Easter shopping according to the list. And they often added something extra or sent even financial support. The total value of purchases was over EUR 11,000. With the help of couriers from the online grocery shop [Lunys.sk](https://lunys.sk), we delivered the purchases safely, quickly and directly to the address

of a specific family. For the second time, the bank's employees also took part in the **Christmas donation** and bought the children, whose parents found themselves in an uneasy life situation, what they most wanted to find under the Christmas tree. Thanks to them, children from 60 families received the coveted toys, building sets, board games, books, sports equipment, musical instruments, clothes and much more. They got everything they asked for in a letter they wrote to Baby Jesus.



Photo: A letter for Baby Jesus with a Christmas wish connected to Christmas donation

We Organized the First Online Charity Market for Hand-made Products

On Mother's Day, we were again touched by the fates of women who turn to us for help. In the past, we organized charity markets for the bank's employees in our premises with the opportunity to support people from sheltered workshops. However, due to the ongoing pandemic, in 2021 we decided to transfer this tradition to the online environment and focused on helping single mothers. We presented their stories to the colleagues and also their offer of handmade things they could buy. In this way, we as people from VUB, were able to bring a double joy by purchasing a product – once to the mother, who got helped by the proceeds from the sale in her difficult financial situation, and the second time, for example, their mothers, who received a gift for Mother's Day.



Photo: Easter donation helped many families during the pandemic crisis

WE CARE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH OF OUR COLLEAGUES

We realize that mental health is as important as physical health, and the past year has been a real test for our mental well-being due to the ongoing pandemic. Therefore, at a time when we were hardly meeting in person at work and sat isolated at home, we decided to pay attention to this problem. For colleagues from the bank, we organized several activities in order to encourage each other and talk about mental health.

It is said that every disease starts in the head and that the idea has the power to heal. We are proud to have been at the establishment of the **Coalition of Businesses for Mental Health** last year and to have

become a partner of the **League for Mental Health**. This step led to development of several activities that allowed us to accompany colleagues on their journey to mental well-being. Each month, we were able to draw inspiration in the form of online discussions, inspirational interviews, workshops and discussions with experts and coaches in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, mental development, counseling intervention services and psychiatry.

The burnout syndrome threatens everyone, including us at VUB. The system of work in the 21st century places extreme demands on everyone, and many of us already feel on the brink of strength and lose motivation and enthusiasm for work. Therefore, we prepared for our employees an inspiring **workshop with psychologists - the authors of the book Not Burned Out (Nevyhoreni)**, during which we were looking for solutions to our situation in the real stories and experiences of people suffering from the burnout syndrome. Colleagues who attended the workshop had the opportunity to find out how to observe the symptoms in time, how to prevent burnout and especially how to stay cool even in difficult times.

We Launched a New Podcast on Mental Health

“How are you?” Is not only a courtesy question, but also the title of a new podcast on mental health, which we have prepared for all of Slovakia. We became its initiator and main partner, because we believe that this topic should be addressed not only internally among colleagues in the bank, but it also need to be given more public space to hear about it.

The aim of the podcast, in which the moderator Šarkan talks to psychologists and psychiatrists, is to de-taboo mental problems, to talk openly about things that we are suffering from in the depths of our souls and that can cause us long-term damage even to our physical health if we suppress them inside.

OUR ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

We are convinced that doing business responsibly means succeeding in ways that protect the environment, respect people and last but not least, respect ethical values and contribute to good corporate governance. We want to be a bank with internal processes based on transparency and sustainability and with partnerships leading to fairness and predictability of the environment we operate in.

WE PUT ETHICS OF OUR BUSINESS ABOVE ALL

VUB Bank does not only comply with the regulations, the observance and fulfilment of which is stipulated by laws and public authorities. We have set a number of our own rules, which are equally necessary for us to adhere to. The key pillars of our corporate social responsibility are ethics and transparency, which also our clients and partners expect from us.

VUB Bank has a Code of Ethics and compliance with it helps us to implement ethics in our business activities. It is a set of principles that is of strategic importance to us and regulates the behavior of our

employees. Getting acquainted with it and observing it is required from all without any distinction. The Code of Ethics is followed by our corporate anti-corruption program containing specific systemic and organizational measures, including an internal audit control system.

VUB Bank's Code of Ethics

VUB Bank's Code of Ethics is one of the pillars of our corporate culture and it is based on the Intesa Sanpaolo Group's Code of Ethics. The basic document has several amendments and related documents and/or policies and rules. These address for example:

- diversity principles and policy of inclusion of all forms of diversity
- prohibition of discrimination against employees, including rules on respecting diversity of sexual orientation and identity
- policy for preventing conflicts of interest
- politiku predchádzania konfliktu záujmov,
- principles and restrictions of employees in accepting and giving gifts
- overall internal code and principles of behavior and conduct of employees

Electronic version of the document is published [on this page](#), in case of non-compliance with the rules of the code, potential reports can be sent to the address etickykodex@vub.sk.

Like any responsible institution paving the way for a sustainable business, also we have a strictly defined anti-corruption program

containing specific organizational measures, including a control system and internal, independent audit. Our policy stipulates the fundamental principle of zero tolerance regarding any potential corruption or fraud, even with the necessary consequences to be drawn.

VUB Bank provides for protection of its clients and the bank itself also with its anti-money laundering or anti-terrorism system, in the form of **detection of unusual business transactions**. In no case do we want to even unknowingly or indirectly support these negative phenomena by enabling financial flows through our products, services or in any connection with the bank. Strict internal rules in this regard also include our non-armament policy, policy on relations with political parties or relations with clients, and transactions from / to high-risk countries.



Photo: VUB Bank regularly updates various internal policies to protect its employees

WE ARE WORKING ON REDUCING OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

It is a matter of utter commonplace for a green bank to take maximum measures regarding its own management and operation, so that we can reduce the carbon footprint we produce more and more every year. This applies to the operation of our Head Office and branches, supplier relationship management and also organization of corporate events.

Thanks to the increased digitization and long-term effort to switch to sending bank statements and correspondence electronically, our total paper consumption **decreased by 72% between 2021 and 2016**. Reducing the number of physically sent postal consignments to our clients in connection with accounts and savings has been a stable trend in our bank. In 2021, we as a bank managed to achieve a 20 percent decrease compared to the previous year.



Photo: Jaroslav Kyš created a unique artwork of bee honeycombs and wax in the lobby of VUB Bank's Head Office in Bratislava

This means, in particular, that we saved paper and envelopes for another 800,000 consignments and approximately 2.5 million A4 pages. After adding up all the savings, we can symbolically save up to 2,500 trees a year compared to the situation from 5 years ago.

Since May last year, we have moved on our path towards a paper-free bank also thanks to another innovation within our digitization. We started sending all documents and notices - not only concerning accounts and savings, but also mortgages - only via a push notification to the telephone or message sent to Internet Banking.

As part of our target of reducing the amount of emissions produced, as a bank we have been also working on increasing our electricity savings. We are increasingly using energy-saving light sources, LED technologies, and R22-based cooling devices that do not deplete the ozone layer. Our clear intention is also to continuously increase the share of energy consumed from renewable sources.

At Our Head Office We Have a Honeycomb Artwork – Referring to the Need to Protect the Planet

Our bank has the largest wall of used bee honeycombs and wax in Slovakia on the premises of its Head Office in Bratislava. We created it in cooperation with the artist Jaroslav Kyš as an unconventional art installation. For VUB Bank, it is a natural combination of two topics that we have actively been involved in - environmental protection and art support. The purpose of the artwork called Reverse Sun is to point out the fragile balance in which our world is, and which is formed by such contrasting entities as the huge glowing sun and a little bee. This unique installation of 3 x 13 metres symbolically reminds us every day when we come to work of our responsibility to the planet and direction we are going to be heading in the future.

WE SUPPORT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN OUR WORK

VUB Bank openly declares support to promoting inclusion and diversity, and therefore on Diversity Day, which in 2021 fell on 31 May, we joined the nationwide **Diversity Charter Slovakia** initiative (under the auspices of the European Diversity Charter Platform) and became its ambassador. By signing it, we confirmed our commitment to create an inclusive, fair and trust-based working environment for the bank's employees. This topic is not new to us at VUB, we have had the principles of diversity and inclusion in our DNA also thanks to our parent group Intesa Sanpaolo.



Photo: One of the topics that VUB Bank deals with is also Diversity and Inclusion

Following this, we also held four interesting **online lectures** for colleagues aimed at highlighting their uniqueness and potential, supporting their strategic development and emphasizing the strength of an individual in an organization that leads to a change of the society itself.

Our effort to work on ourselves in this area is also confirmed by the new official internal **Diversity and Inclusion Principles**, which we adopted in 2021 with the aim of creating a working environment based on plurality, respect and harmony. This step also helps us to change the climate in practice in our offices even more, where people with different qualities, beliefs or opinions can come together and create values, where everyone can express themselves freely and where talent and qualities of an individual are recognized and valued through equal opportunities for professional growth and remuneration.

WE BELIEVE THAT UNITY BRINGS STRENGTH

We will never achieve the goals for a sustainable future that we care about only by our own performance. We want to leverage our knowledge and resources as a partnership input for joint initiatives. Therefore, we use as many opportunities as possible to inspire and connect with each other - with other banks, public institutions and other companies.

We consider it a great honour that in September last year we had a significant place as a partner also at the internationally recognized **Globsec Tatra Summit 2021**. The event featuring political and financial leaders from around the world pertained to the national recovery plan and also to the **Memorandum on Permanently Sustainable Business and Development**, which was initiated by the banks associated within the Slovak Banking Association. We are proud that VUB Bank was one of the main initiators of this joint agenda. For us, the Memorandum represents another public commitment to the joint adherence to the ESG principles in our business activities, which will

continue to be applied in relation to state authorities and institutions, employees, clients, business partners, the whole society and last but not least the environment and the planet.

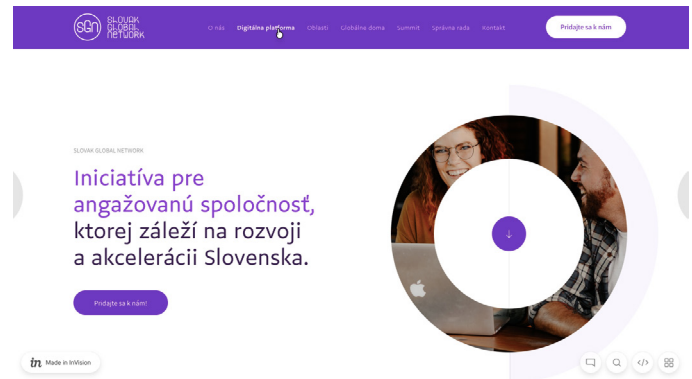


Photo: VUB Bank as the main partner of Slovak Global Network

The Slovak Global Network is an innovative digital platform connecting companies, talents and institutions for the good of Slovakia, and since last year our bank has been a part of it. We are delighted that in this way we can also join forces with engaged experts from various sectors, innovative entrepreneurs and young people who feel socially responsible. The purpose of the platform is to group and connect an extensive network of Slovaks at home and abroad, thus increasing the visibility of Slovak sustainability-based projects and initiatives.

In 2021, VUB Bank also joined **the Fund for Transparent Slovakia**, which is another unique initiative of socially responsible businesses. The associated companies provide financial and non-financial support to watchdog and analytical organizations. Their aim is to monitor compliance with laws, ethical standards, improve the business environment, increase transparency and reduce corruption, save public resources and help kick-start change, for example by increasing the chances of better law enforcement. With this step, we naturally followed up on our many years of active work within the platform of the Business Leaders Forum of the Pontis Foundation.

We are also a member of the **Circular Slovakia** platform - a public and private platform for supporting circular economy. Our common goal is to bring together companies and firms, government and expert institutions, associations and non-governmental organizations and thus accelerate the transition to a greener and circular Slovakia. Our main task within the platform is to support raising awareness of the importance and possibilities of green and sustainable funding.



Photo: CEO Alexander Resch representing VUB Bank at the GLOBSEC forum

Check out Our Profile on SmartHead

We want you to know about all our steps we are taking to adhere to the principles of ESG. Therefore, in 2021 we also entered the [SmartHead](#) digital platform. Here you can see our sustainability profile - you will find here an overview of all our activities that we strive for. This platform also serves us to better optimize our performance, to get inspired by the impacts and results even of others. We are pleased that, as part of this initiative, last year we already received an award for this active and transparent approach to building a sustainable business.

Prestigious Awards Also Give Us the Energy for Further Work

- Also in 2021, VUB was the most stable and safest bank in Slovakia. The award is presented by the prestigious Global Finance magazine and it selects the winners from among the 1,000 largest banks worldwide based on long-term ratings from renowned agencies such as Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch. VUB also gained its title as a green bank, opening up new society-wide topics, applying the ESG principles and sustainability not only in the banking sector but also in society as a whole.
- We are regularly granted domestic awards for creativity and efficiency in communication; however, in 2021 we also experienced great international success. For the "Saver" campaign, VUB Bank received the highest award at the prestigious international competition Euro Effie Awards 2020. We have thus entered the list of premium global brands that use proper communication to build their reputation in the area of supporting quality of life and social impacts.
- The Hermes Communicator of the Year award is presented to companies that, in the public opinion, have the best communication with their customers. VUB Bank took the first place in its category.
- Our bank ranks also among the TOP companies nominated for the Best Employer Award. The results for 2021 are only to be announced yet, however in 2020 we placed 2nd.



Photo: VUB Bank employees are regularly involved in volunteering and donation initiatives



www.vub.sk, 0850 123 000

Bank of **INTESA**  **SANPAOLO**