



OUR FOOTPRINTS IN THE WORLD 2022

VUB Bank's results
in ESG areas



VUB BANKA

Intesa Sanpaolo Group

FOR ALL THAT COUNTS

www.vub.sk

INTRODUCTION

A STEP CLOSER TO SUSTAINABILITY

We are VUB - the first bank in Slovakia to make sustainability and conservation the DNA of its business. We are a corporation and, first and foremost, a team of people that has been publicly espousing its **Green Manifesto** for three years. Because as a society, companies and individuals, we cannot relent in our collective efforts to think and act together to save our planet and our future. This task rests with each of us, and we at VUB are doing everything we can to make our footprint in the world a green one.

We are proud that we do not have to rely only on words and plans, but on concrete actions and results. They testify that, together with our parent group Intesa Sanpaolo, we are among the banks that consider the consistent adoption of ESG principles to be the only way forward for financial institutions in the 2020s of the 21st century. Every day, we are aware that **our primary task is to maximise our positive impact on the environment and society, while adhering to the strictest principles of transparent and ethical management.**

In Slovakia, we have done a lot of work recently with our colleagues and partners on our own ESG strategy, promoting the green economy and stimulating dialogue between key parties who hold systemic change in their hands. We have created a dedicated team of experts in the bank to cover this area on a day-to-day basis and ensure that our objectives are met across all departments.

For us, 2022 was marked by comprehensive analyses of the environmental impact of our operations and embarking on a detailed roadmap of changes to become a climate neutral bank by 2030. We have also added significantly in offering green and social banking solutions so that as many households, businesses and municipalities as possible become part of these investments for the benefit of the planet and society. Like all companies founded on the values of humanity and solidarity, we are doing our part to support others who are living on the edge in today's critical times. Our thanks goes to all 3 500 VUB employees who give their hearts, minds and hands to our mission. And also to all of you - our clients and partners. It motivates us greatly when, after reading this ESG report, you conclude that our work is meaningful.

1. OUR SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS AND FINANCING

Everything we do today has an impact on how we forecast the future of the planet and its people. At VUB, we have decided to elevate the principles of sustainability to one of the most important in our business. Our mission is to minimize the burden of our existence on the environment and maximize the environmental and social progress we can contribute to by managing our banking finances responsibly.

1. 1. WE COUNT OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

One of the priorities of our ESG strategy in 2022 was to address the analysis of our carbon footprint and quantifying our environmental impact. Our vision is clear. Based on this, we want to continue to look for specific areas where we need to improve in order to meet our target **of becoming a climate-neutral bank by 2030.**

For a bank that identifies itself as green, it is a matter of course to take every measure in terms of our own management and operations to reduce our carbon footprint and the burden on natural resources year after year. Thanks to our emphasis on digitalisation and our long-term efforts to move to sending bank statements and correspondence electronically, **our overall paper consumption has fallen by 35% year-on-year.**

In 2022, we have committed to a significant shift forward for us in our own carbon strategy. We have developed a detailed **inventory** of the sources of direct and indirect

greenhouse gas emissions from all of VUB Bank's activities and operations, and **calculated them clearly in CO2 equivalent units.** We assessed emissions from electricity, heat and hot water, natural gas, fuel, waste and also from refrigerant leakage. The calculation was carried out according to the methodology of the international standard ISO 14 064 from 2020 and the correctness of the procedure and the resulting values were verified by the certification company TUV Sud. At the same time, we have developed a **strategy to reduce these emissions** in order to meet the carbon neutrality targets to which our parent bank has committed itself by joining several international initiatives - including joining the NetZero global banking alliance.

Where do we see ourselves in the future?

The direction of VUB is clearly given. Our vision is carbon neutrality through energy and material savings, energy efficiency, intelligent management and cost-saving technologies. We will progressively reduce the fossil fuels consumed in the production of our heat, hot water, electricity and fuel. By 2030, we will buy 100% of our electricity from renewable sources and the majority of our vehicles will be electric. We will continue to reduce the production of waste and increase recycling and minimise the disposal of our waste in landfill. The part of emissions that we will not be able to reduce, we will compensate for (in other words, offset) through so-called ecosystem projects. These will include, for example, planting and protecting forests or soil and water conservation.



VÚB Bank's Green Funds campaign

In August, we adopted an internal directive on **green procurement**. We are thus starting to look again at our supplier selection process to ensure that we only use inputs, energy-efficient media, equipment and services for our operations and activities that have the least impact on the planet, conserve natural resources and are socially sound and sustainable. By doing so, we are also engaging our business partners and suppliers so that together we can transform Slovakia's economy in line with the principles of sustainability.

With this intention, we have joined a number of initiatives to change the legislative conditions that lead, for example, to reducing Slovakia's dependence on natural gas, accelerating the renovation of buildings to energy-efficient ones in coordination with the *Buildings for the Future* platform, wider application of wooden buildings in partnership with the *Slovak Council for Green Buildings*, or an effective climate law under the leadership of the *Climate Coalition*.

We stand on the strong ESG pillars of our parent bank

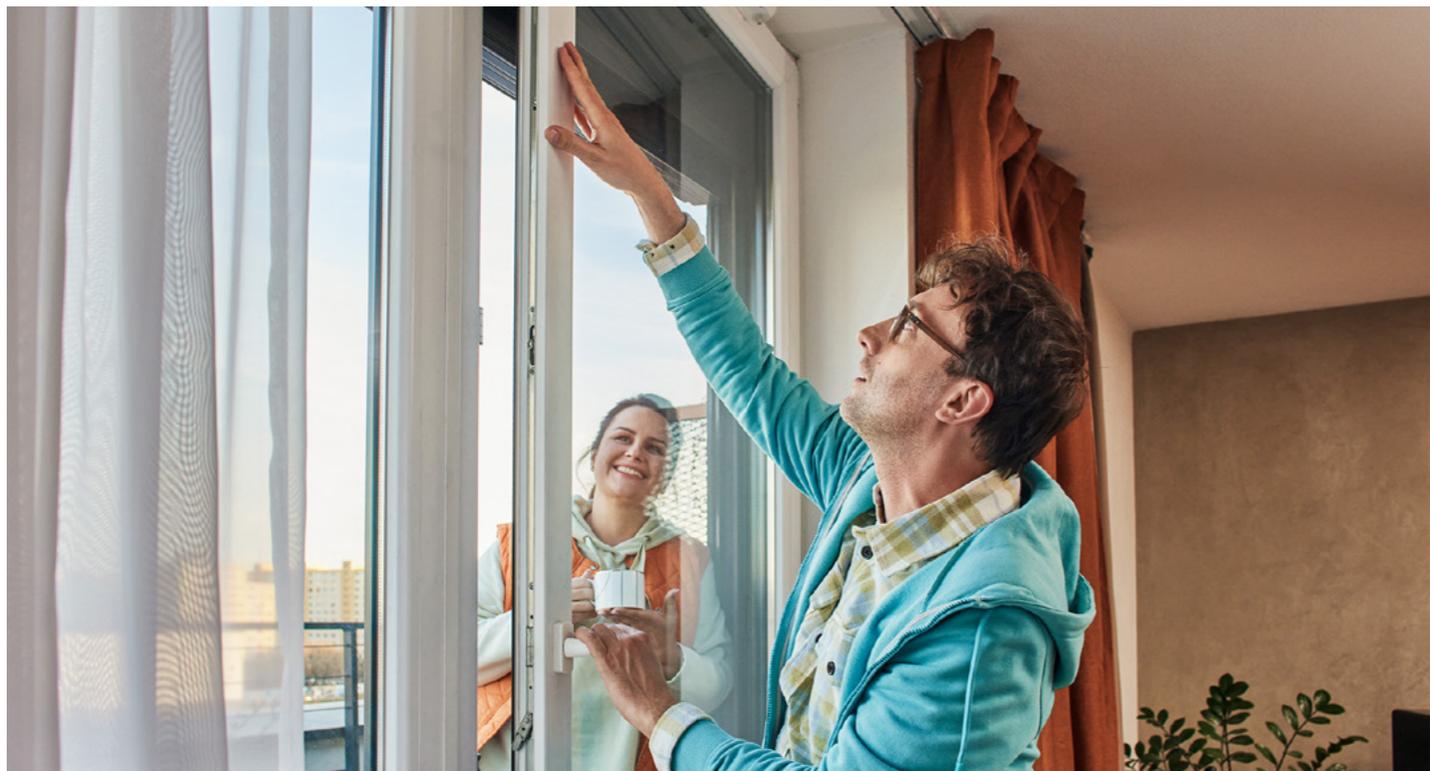
Our Intesa Sanpaolo Banking Group is one of the world's leading companies with the highest ESG commitments. The ambition to support the transition to a green economy and to fight for sustainability is more pronounced than ever in the ISP Group's business plan for 2022 to 2025. The plan foresees a total of EUR 88 billion in pre-financing to support the global transition to a circular economy and renewable energy. Significant growth is also planned in the area of ESG investment support in cooperation with the global asset management group Eurizon, up to EUR 156 billion in 2025. Our parent bank has also undertaken to leave a concrete, huge footprint in nature. It plans to adopt an even more effective policy to promote biodiversity and will help plant 100 million trees over four years.

1. 2. MAKING THE TRANSITION TO A GREENER HOME EASIER FOR OUR CLIENTS

Our offer of green banking products continues to grow, as we have resolved and declared in the VUB Green Manifesto. New in 2022 is a specially discounted Green Loan for anyone who is renovating their home or buying a new car while keeping in mind the carbon footprint of their household.

Green technology at home is far from just for the rich. Although it may be a higher initial investment, it can save you a lot of money on heating, hot water or electricity in the long run. Instead of spending thousands of euros a year, this can

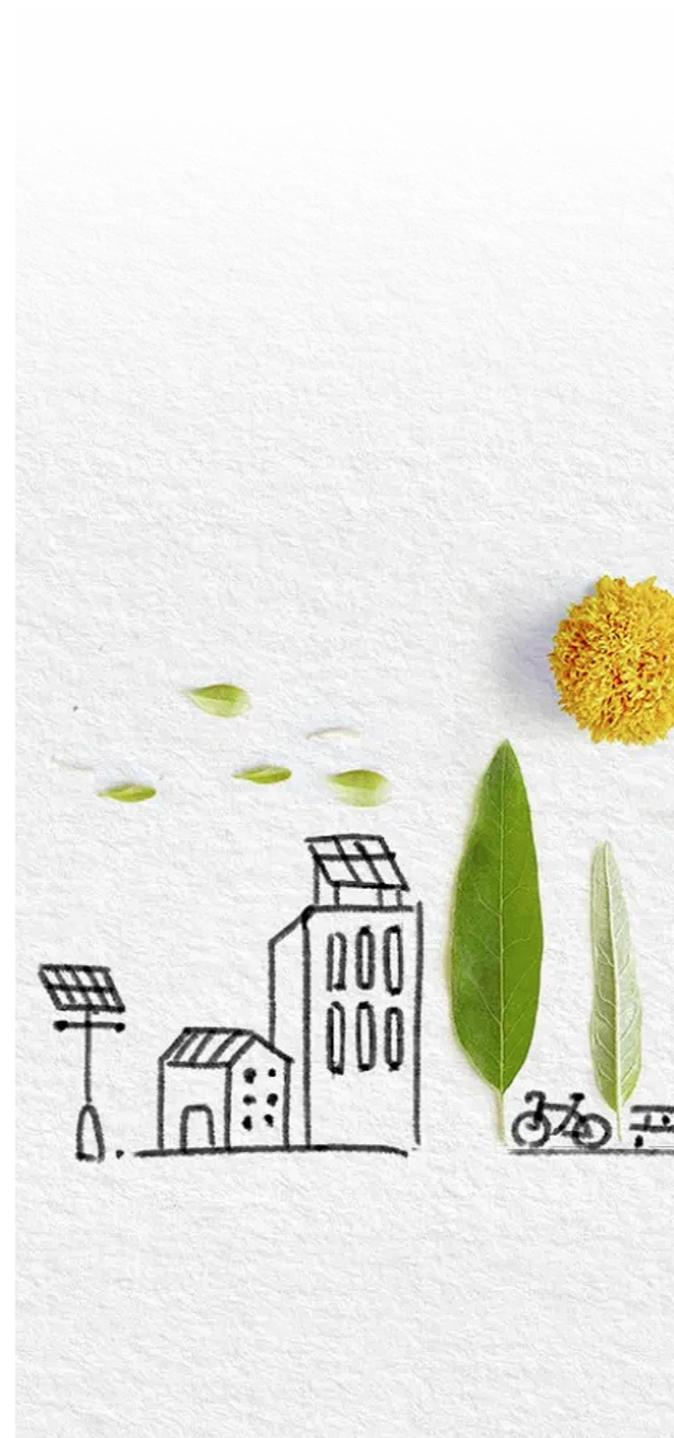
lower energy costs by up to 90%. A low-energy and green property also means that it holds a higher value for a long time. The cost of building a passive house is only slightly higher, but the savings will last a lifetime.



VÚB Bank's Green Financing campaign

For clients who have decided to build or reconstruct in accordance with the low-energy standard, we were the first bank in Slovakia to offer a discounted **Green Mortgage** in 2021. Last year, we followed up on this step and the **Green Loan** became part of our permanent portfolio, which has a wide range of uses in the home - to finance technologies that increase the energy efficiency of the property or bring eco-friendly innovations that reduce the carbon footprint to the house or apartment - for example, solar panels, a biomass boiler, a heat pump, replacement windows, insulation of the house with high-quality insulation, a green roof, a rainwater tank. Last but not least, green means of transport - electric cars - can also be financed in this way.

Therefore, if you are going to invest in this area at home and want to borrow money for this purpose, we want to support you in this ecological thinking. Our Green Loan has a discounted interest rate and we will refund the origination fee once the conditions are met. It also has the advantage of not only covering planned renovations and purchases, but also refinancing work already completed. We send the money up to EUR 35, 000 immediately after signing the contract and the repayment period is arbitrary, ranging from 13 to 96 months. To give you an even better idea of how to get a Green Loan, we have prepared a handy calculator on our website. Many useful tips for green living and practical advice on how to proceed with the planning, progress and completion of a green renovation can also be found in our **e-book**.



Green loan

We bring the most opportunities to invest in green funds

It is good news that more and more people are monitoring the behaviour of companies towards the environment, society and their employees. And this influences not only their purchasing behaviour, but also their personal investing. That's why the popularity of appreciating savings through ESG funds is growing year on year.

As a green bank, we have long offered the **broadest portfolio of ESG funds** in Slovakia for investments in demonstrably sustainable global companies with the highest green ratings and the highest ethical standards. This is made possible by our direct link with Eurizon, the global asset management group and a leader in this field. This makes us Slovakia's number 1 bank in the distribution of these green funds.

If you choose to invest your money in these funds, you can be assured that they will operate in a commercial environment where sustainable, responsible and ethical business and behaviour are considered core values. In doing so, you have the opportunity for higher appreciation than with savings, and you are participating in the progress of top companies in innovative areas such as electromobility, renewables and future technologies. In short, your decision will have a positive impact not only on your family budget but also on the planet.



Illustrative photo of photovoltaic panels

1. 3. WE INTRODUCE LOANS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPANIES AND LOCAL SELF-MUNICIPALITIES

In 2022, we as a bank have once again made a significant shift in our commitment to facilitate the transition to greener and more responsible business and management for Slovak companies and local self-municipalities. All positive changes require an initial investment, and this can now be more easily accessed with the help of our new VUB TERRA banking products with a discounted interest rate.

This is thanks to a fund set up for this purpose by our parent company Intesa Sanpaolo. By granting **VUB TERRA** convenient loans, we want to play an active part in improving environmental protection (TERRA ENVIRO), social support and services (TERRA SOCIAL) and also transparent and fair corporate governance (TERRA GOVERNANCE).

Where are we going to send the EUR 5,000 for the green purpose? Students decide at account opening

In the autumn, we introduced a new special product for young people - the Student Account, which is not only worthwhile for people aged 15 to 30, but also makes them feel extra good when they open it. In fact, we combined the new account with the idea of a voting contest, where we give away the prize not to the clients themselves, but send it to those who come up with solutions for a cleaner and healthier environment. Everyone who opened a VUB Student Account until mid-February 2023 received a special code to send their vote to one of four selected projects - to the organisation Upracme Slovakia, the mobile app for nature Lesmír, OZ Živica or the SPU educational project on climate change. The idea with the most support from young people receives funding from us for further development in the amount of EUR 5,000.

Companies and local self-municipalities whose green projects meet the criteria supporting circular economy and environmental sustainability practices can obtain a preferential interest rate through the **VUB ENVIRO loan**. If, when applying for the loan, they commit to achieve specific ESG objectives, such as implementing a green procurement policy, achieving carbon neutrality, reducing water consumption, sustainably managing of natural resources or increasing energy efficiency, they can also receive a preferential interest rate through the **S-LOAN sustainable financing product**.

We have a plastic-free, no-fee credit card

In recent years, cards made from recycled materials have become a sort of hallmark of banks' efforts to be more environmentally friendly. We decided to go a little further. We give our customers a no-fee credit card that wasn't needed to be produced all. In fact, it only exists on the mobile. We process the card with zero carbon footprint and zero environmental burden expressly and it can be used virtually in just a few days conveniently via mobile or smart watch.

1. 4. WE SUPPORT THE GREEN RENOVATION OF HOMES AND BUILDINGS

We care about creating solutions that move forward the green renovation of family houses in Slovakia. As a bank, we work with the Slovak Environmental Agency and offer our co-financing to make this important project within the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan a reality in the coming years.

One of the important areas of our implementation within the offer of discounted **Green Loans** for residential clients is also support for owners of family houses who are arranging green renovation with the help of the state. This long-awaited system of allocating state subsidies for the renovation of family homes was launched in October 2022 and is expected to help 30,000 households become greener and more economical not only for the environment but also for their wallets by 2026. We can help get this plan off the ground with our discounted Green Loan. This will help pay for renovations here and now, for which the government subsidy will then help clients get some of the money back.

Our mission to actively participate in the professional dialogue on real solutions for reducing the carbon footprint of buildings and entire local self-municipalities can also be seen in **our partnership with Manifest 2020**. In this context, we are delighted to have been able to sit down with experts from Nová Cvernovka, with whom we have a long-standing friendship through our foundation, alongside other leading figures in the field of architecture. How to transform cities and regions into carbon neutral ones? How to translate the principles of the New European Bauhaus into life in Slovakia? How to move forward the green renovation of historic and public buildings? These topics were also discussed in the expert roundtables and awareness-raising campaigns under the banner of *Manifest 2020* in 2022.



VÚB Bank has won a prestigious Sustainable Finance Award

We won a prestigious award for sustainable financing

Last year, the renowned US magazine *Global Finance* offered banks from around the world the chance to enter its prestigious *Sustainable Finance Awards 2022*. This recognises financial institutions that excel in how they secure funding for important green initiatives and projects, and inspire creativity in tackling environmental issues. The winners in each category were banking institutions from 63 countries around the world. We are very proud that VUB Bank has won this award in Slovakia. This recognition is a joint merit and achievement of all our colleagues who work to continuously improve our approach to environmental protection as a green bank.

1. 5. WE ARE PARTNER OF MUNICIPALITIES

In the difficult times of 2022, we have decided to support our clients at the local self administration of towns and municipalities and to contribute to their stability and sustainable development. That is why VUB Bank has signed a partnership agreement with **the Association of Cities and Municipalities of Slovakia (ZMOS)** for the seventh time. Advancing cooperation in financing and providing banking services for cities, municipalities, VÚC and their budgetary and contributory organisations is one of the important areas of our bank's activity. We are proud of the fact that VUB's clients today include more than 2,000 local self-administrations in Slovakia. We appreciate how municipalities and cities have coped with the pandemic, the migration crisis after the beginning of the war in Ukraine and we want to assist them in other difficult periods. One of the objectives of the cooperation is therefore to find partner financing solutions for local self-administrations on their way to energy self-sufficiency and sustainability.

2. OUR SUPPORT FOR THE PLANET AND PEOPLE

Our field of implementation and influence goes far beyond the bank. Being a responsible corporation and giving back to society in the form of non-repayable support is now commonplace. The challenge for us, however, remains how effectively and with what impact we can redistribute these resources. And also how authentically and in the long term we can develop cooperation with those who translate them into concrete actions to help the planet and people.

FOR NATURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE EARTH

2. 1. WE VALUE THOSE WHO CARRY THE FATE OF THE PLANET ON THEIR SHOULDERS

On Earth Day, Slovakia recognized the winners of the second year of our Atlas Environmental Award. We presented it to eight initiatives for their actions in nature conservation, which inspire us all. We are proud that after last year's premiere, this time the award had more winners and the contribution of the Slovak Ministry of the Environment, the ZMOS organisation and also the well-known British natural history filmmaker and conservationist Nigel Marven.

The winners of the Atlas 2022 Award were decided by a jury of renowned experts from the domestic environmental scene. The winners of the largest domestic initiative aimed at rewarding acts of environmental protection, the symbolism of which is associated in the name with a mythological figure carrying the fate of the world, emerged from among 21 finalists. They were selected by a jury on the basis of public nominations submitted in the first round. A total of eight prizes were awarded in eight categories for non-profit organisations, awareness-raising initiatives, eco-startups, companies based on the principles of the green economy, municipalities and also long-standing active personalities. We want promising environmental projects to continue and their positive impact to multiply. That is why we have added grants for the further development of organisations in four categories, totalling EUR 40,000.

For the Atlas Awards, we have again prepared a special documentary to bring the stories of all the finalists to the attention of all green enthusiasts. It also captures the moment of the award ceremony, which took place in the Prüger-Wallner Garden in Bratislava. The documentary premiered on Earth Day, 22 April on VUB Bank's social media and was also aired on RTVS - Dvojka. [You can watch it here.](#)

We are honoured that one of Britain's best-known nature documentary filmmakers, Nigel Marven, who is producing a film in Slovakia with the aim of revealing the beauty of our nature to the world, attended the awards ceremony in person. This will premiere in 2023 and will add to his already more than 150 wildlife films from all continents. Nigel Marven was kind enough to talk to our [Srdcovky](#) magazine about what he finds unique in Slovak nature and what plans he has for our country.

PEOPLE WHO DESERVED THE ATLAS 2022 AWARDS

- In the *Biodiversity* category, the prize went to the team of the **Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protectors**, working in the **Slovak Paradise**, for a project to protect bats and birds during the insulation of buildings in Spiš.
- Among the projects in the *Environment* category, the Atlas Award went to the **Volunteer Centre of the Košice Region**, which strives to use rainwater in Košice as a natural irrigation of the land. It builds ponds and gardens and fights against discharges into the sewers. Over the last three years, the association has succeeded in capturing 9 million litres of water, which remains in the country and improves the microclimate in the city.
- The **Faculty of Horticulture and Landscape Engineering SPU in Nitra** became the winner of the award in the category *Outreach (Osveta)*. This institution has long been dedicated to enviro education about the serious consequences of climate change, which it explains in various practical forms, not only to students, but also to city residents and professionals.
- The winner of the *Eco-startups* category was the company **EURO-ROYAL GREMI L.t.d.** from Nová Baňa,

which runs an environmentally friendly business with the production of hempcrete - a building material made of hemp and lime with a negative carbon footprint. This goes hand in hand with community building, focused on education about healthy natural building and permaculture development.

- Large companies and their solutions belong to the *Green Economy* category. The Atlas Award was given to **e-Dome Inc.** for the creation of an energy saving system with a guarantee for the University Hospital with Polyclinic Nové Zámky, which will enable it to reduce CO₂ emissions by 2,000 tonnes per year.
- *The best local government project* was submitted by the **municipality of Lenartov** in the district f Bardejov. In it, they undertook to work with communities to prevent black dumps and improve local waste management. In two years, the municipality managed to increase the waste sorting rate from 13% to 31%.
- The last of the categories - *Heroes* - was a new addition to this year's awards, with the aim of highlighting the life story and courage of a particular individual and recognising their enduring, long-standing contribution. The laureate was **Rudolf Pado, Chairman of OZ Tatry**.
- The list of the Atlas 2022 awards is concluded by a *special jury recognition*, which the experts decided to award across all categories. It was awarded to the **Andrej Bagar Theatre** in Nitra for its nominated project of a play for children and youth, *Until Silence*, which educates about a urgent topic not only through facts but also through experience and emotions.

Conservationists from Spiš earned an award for saving bats in housing estates

Prefabricated houses in Spiš are among the most inhabited by the rusty bat in Slovakia. These inhabitants, unwanted by many people, have an irreplaceable role in nature - they feed on insects active during the night. Human dwellings have become their natural habitat and are the key to their survival. However, these bats began to die out in large numbers when the era of building insulation has begun. They became trapped in the gaps between the panels.

The team of the Slovak Union of Nature Conservationists from Spišská Nová Ves undertook the difficult task of saving these animals. They started mapping their occurrence in housing estates and found out where the insulation is going to be done so that they could help the endangered bats. For years they have been trying to persuade builders to give them access to building sites in order to evict the bats and put up bat boxes to replace the destroyed nests.

After many years, these efforts have finally resulted in legislative measures whereby protected animal issues must be included in the project documentation, binding for the issuance of a building permit. The long-standing work of conservationists in the housing estates of Spišská Nová Ves, which has resulted in the rescue of thousands of endangered animals, as well as the innovative approach to energy efficiency of buildings, which has resonated with the Atlas Environmental Award jury. You can read more about it [in the article in Srdcovky magazine](#).

Hempcrete: an eco-friendly material for healthy homes in harmony with nature

Hemp is a fast-growing, annual plant with a wide range of uses. It consumes a significant amount of carbon dioxide for its growth and is easy to cultivate. It has also found its application in the building industry. Have you heard of hempcrete? It is made by mixing hemp flint and a special mixture of lime. This material has different uses than conventional concrete. While it is used to build load-bearing structures, hempcrete is used as thermal insulation for the cladding of wooden structures. So it doesn't have the strength of a classic one, but it has many other benefits. It is a natural material with no chemical additives, which does not leave a carbon footprint and has a positive impact on human health. It is a mouldable living material that can be worked with in many different ways and resembles the appearance of wood at first sight.

Gregor Galeta from Nová Baňa, an enthusiast for progressive and sustainable construction, decided to establish the Hempcrete SK (Konopný betón SK) project in times of skyrocketing prices of commercial materials and increasing demand for renewable resources in the construction industry. His idea is so original and beneficial that the jury of the enviro award Atlas 2022 awarded him the victory in the Eco Startups category. If you are interested in this new kind of natural building material, read the article about it [on Srdcovky](#).



The Atlas Forum was held at the Ponton restaurant on the Danube

2. 2. WE CREATE A SPACE FOR EXPERT DISCUSSION AND GREEN INSPIRATION

We are proud to be developing our green Atlas brand in practice more and more. We not only want to recognise solutions that lead to planetary protection and sustainability, but also to create space for them to be discussed more and more in professional circles. That is why we established a new platform, the VUB Atlas Forum, in the spring. However, in order to make it more than just one annual conference, we decided to add a smaller discussion format, VUB Atlas Talks, to our calendar of regular events.

During the first edition of the **VUB Atlas Forum** conference on 24 May in Bratislava, we welcomed hundreds of experts, representatives of public and state institutions, partners and clients of VUB. We are glad that we were able to bring together a number of inspiring people to share ideas, solutions and practices that could contribute to creating a green, smart and fair future for all. The first year of the conference gave space to current topics such as energy independence and the transformation of Slovakia. Experts also discussed the vision of sustainable cities and urban planning for the next decades, green building renovation and the New European Bauhaus. In the presentations section, a number of participants shared their inspirations and green solutions put into practice, including companies that have won the Atlas Award.

At the beginning of October, on the occasion of the end of *Green Building Week 2022*, of which we are a part as a partner of *the Slovak Green Building Council*, we organized the first of a series of smaller, follow-up discussion meetings - **VUB Atlas Talks** - at our headquarters. Experts at the event agreed: We have a lot of room for energy savings and we need to combine the forces of state and corporate financing to fight the energy and climate crisis. Inspiring ideas from this panel discussion, which we intend to continue in 2023, can be found on our [VUB Atlas Talks](#) event page.

WE „GREEN“ OUR ACTIONS

The VUB Atlas Forum conference was not only about sustainable solutions, green energy and innovative ideas. It was also the first demonstration of the ecological principles of organising our own events, which we have decided to follow in practice. Here are a few of the stricter ESG rules that we have built the Atlas Forum on and are developing for other events.

- ➔ All communication with the invited guests was electronic, we did not produce any other materials, the name badges of the participants were printed on textile, without a plastic sleeve, and the rollups and banners were digital.
- ➔ We advised guests to use low-carbon transport (bicycles, scooters, public transport) when travelling to the event.
- ➔ The snacks were vegetarian and what was not eaten went to refugees from Ukraine staying nearby. We did not order bottled water and drinks, but offered tap water and local organic syrups to the guests.
- ➔ The chosen venue for this event was Ponton, anchored on the Danube, which even has a small source of renewable energy - a heat pump.



Winners of the Atlas environmental award with judge Nigel Marven

According to the Slovak Green Building Council (SKGBC), buildings statistically consume 40% of the total energy and generate approximately 37% of CO2 emissions. Systematic work to reduce building consumption and the emissions associated with them is therefore undoubtedly one of the primary solutions in the fight against climate change. We also see our role in this area by continuing our partnership with the SKGBC, whereby we are directly involved in standardising the criteria and assessment methodology for buildings applying for a green mortgage or loan for green renovation. This alliance also allows us to be at the source of current events, trends, legislation and education.

In 2022, as partners of SKGBC, we were part of several meaningful events that bring the topic of planning, construction and operation of efficient and healthy buildings closer to reality - not only the annual *Green Building Summit* conference, the educational series *Green Building Academy*, but also our participation in the organization of the 12th edition of the renowned event Green Building Week in Slovakia. With the intention of spreading the professional debate, as a partner of SKGBC we have also directly supported webinars and discussion formats organized by the *Buildings for the Future* platform - the largest professional interest association for the building sector in Slovakia.

We make visible architecture that is closer to nature

In recent years, the topic of environmental responsibility in construction and architecture has become so popular that it is also at the forefront of public awards in this sector. The most well-known initiative of this kind in Slovakia, the CE ZA AR award, whose announcer is the Slovak Chamber of Architects and which draws attention to the social value of buildings and works, has in its recent years joined the global movement of emphasising green principles in architecture. As a bank that stands for real deeds and buildings contributing to a better quality of life and improving the state of the environment, last year we again signed up to this initiative and continued as a general partner of the CE ZA AR Award.



Živica, a non-profit NGO, also received an Envirogrant

2.3. WE DISTRIBUTE GREEN GRANTS

Every single grant that we are able to help someone in Slovakia in their efforts to preserve natural heritage gives us joy and satisfaction. People who devote their time and energy to working tirelessly for the future of ourselves and our children desperately need allies in the corporate sector in Slovakia. With this intention we allocate our **Envirogrants**.

An adventure game that attracts children to the nature, rescuing birds and animals that are losing their homes due to castle restoration, cleaning and restoring mountain springs in the Malá Fatra - these are some examples of useful projects that received support from our Envirogrants programme at the end of last year. This is the third time that our VUB Foundation has supported civic associations and conservation organisations that have a long-term vision and plan to protect nature, reverse the threat of the climate crisis and spread the principles of sustainable living. A committee of experts selected eight projects with the expected greatest impact, among which went grants totaling EUR 50,000.

During these months, **Slatinka Association** (Zvolen), **STEFANI n.o.** (Žarnovica), **Parents and Friends of M. Hella in Štiavnické Bane**, **Municipal Green Administration in Košice**, **OZ HORAL RIVER** (Žilina), **OZ Castrum Thorna** (Turňa nad Bodvou, Košice district), **OZ Naše Zálesičko** (Zálesie, Senec district) and **CEEV Živica** (Zaježová, Zvolen district) can launch their initiatives aimed at combating the increasing loss of biodiversity or developing a harmonious relationship between nature and tourism. We believe that these projects will not only benefit nature and the environment itself, but will also act as an inspiration. We wish that thanks to their example, people all over Slovakia will decide to think and act more environmentally friendly, and also that other companies will join this society-wide movement with their resources and by changing their own behaviour.



Envirogrants ad campaign by the VUB Foundation

THE FOLLOWING ENVIRO PROJECTS HAVE BORNE FRUIT IN 2022



→ Thanks to the non-profit Aegis, the possibilities of experiential ecotourism are expanding in the Poloniny National Park. Thanks to it, regions in protected areas can prosper economically and at the same time preserve their natural values. What is important in nature tourism is to provide authentic experiences through being in nature, wandering through the landscape, observing wildlife, sleeping under a starry sky or learning about the culture of local people. All of this is provided as far as possible by local service providers, including guides.



→ The rescue station and ecological centre in Zázrivá help injured animals and abandoned baby animals living in the wild to return to the wild. Thousands of animals have already passed through the hands of conservationists in Orava. Thanks to a grant from the VUB Foundation, the centre has recently added a mobile or makeshift veterinary clinic, where they will be able to carry out basic animal rescue procedures on the spot.



→ The number of cyclists in the capital is growing, many are switching to a more sustainable mode of transport and want to live healthier lives. Their interests have been promoted for eleven years by the Cyclocoalition, which has been dedicated to the development of cycling in negotiations with municipalities and investors. On the Danube embankment, it also operates a CycleKitchen, where you can borrow tools, repair your bike, or consult with more experienced mechanics for a voluntary contribution. The workshop is also well equipped thanks to support from Envirogrants.

All the stories of the projects implemented in 2022 can also be found in our magazine [Srdcovky](#).

2. 4. WE'RE MAKING HEADWAY ON CLIMATE CHANGE

It makes sense to engage in activities that instil the right values, respect nature and deliver long-term results. That's why we were happy to support the continuation of the unique outreach initiative in schools, *For a Better Future for the Earth*. 700 schools, 24,000 pupils and 726 teachers from all over Slovakia took part in the second edition of the digital education programme on climate change and nature conservation, in which children set out to explore the waters and depths of the sea.

Eduvision is the agency behind the idea of interactive education about the necessity of protecting the planet and the principles of greener living, which has put together original content and a playful learning tool in collaboration with climate and environmental experts. **It is free of charge for primary school classes in grades 4 to 7 and can be a great complement to environmental education, science and social studies lessons.** The innovative programme offers schools a range of activities in an engaging format - a digital course introduces important facts, fun games and quizzes take the learning experience even further. All online content is suitable for the classroom but can also be worked with in the form of homework.

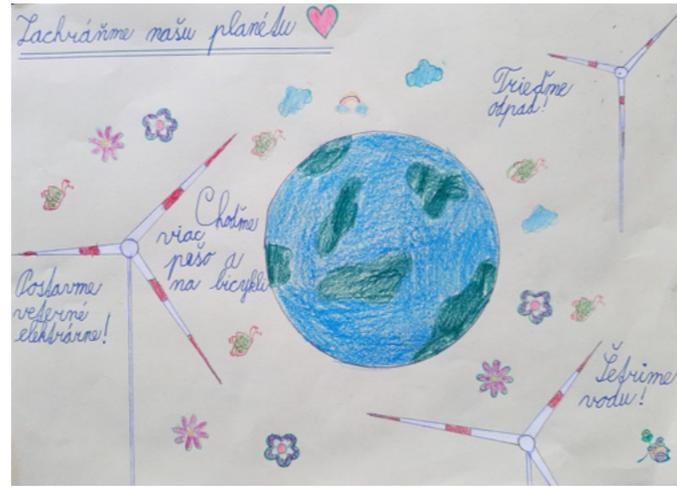
The excellent programme, which has already reached thousands of pupils and us at VUB Bank during its pilot year, focused last school year on the importance of water for humanity, animals



A drawing from the For a Better Future of the Earth 2 competition

and our entire planet. The children were able to understand in a way that was close to their hearts what is happening to the oceans and the water cycle in the nature due to climate change, what problems are caused by changes in the temperature of the oceans, melting of glaciers, disappearance of coral reefs or plastics in the seas. They also learnt about innovations that help clean up industrial production, green electricity and replaceable resources.

As the main partner of the initiative, we were also involved in the co-organisation of the creative point after the programme. The children were able to illustrate the knowledge they had gained about water conservation in nature with their drawings and take part in the accompanying competition. The authors of the three best entries - pupils from primary schools in Skalica, Suchá nad Parnou and Veľký Krtíš - were awarded special prizes in June, and the first place winner also won a trip to Bratislava for her



The winning drawing from the For a Better Future of the Earth 2 competition

entire class. As well as having fun in the Nivy shopping centre, they also took a walk on its green roof, the importance of which for the climate in cities was taught in the course itself.

OUR GREEN MEETINGS IN NOVÁ CVERNOVKA

The VUB Foundation calendar for May 1 was traditionally filled with a programme in Nová Cvernovka. As a long-time supporter of this cultural and creative centre with a huge contribution also to the topic of sustainability, we again could not miss the all-day event, which was popular with thousands of people from the capital, including many families with children. This time we used our participation to give the children a fun and educational activity in the spirit of ecology. We rolled up our sleeves and made recycled paper with the little visitors.

We returned to the unique ecological Suťopark in the exterior of the former secondary chemical school in Bratislava on 31 July for an event organized by Nová Cvernovka in cooperation with the Climate Needs You initiative. It brought together hundreds of people who want to be ambassadors of enviro education and lifestyle. We are glad that such green activities also took place during the summer series of events Summer under the Palm, which we supported with our foundation as a partner of Nová Cvernovka. The program included a very beneficial walk in the community garden that covered making and using homemade compost. This has huge benefits not only for a richer and healthier harvest, but especially for the overall improvement of soil quality, which is of huge importance in the fight against climate change.



Our guide to a household where we save nature, money and our health

Modern times bring many challenges to life at home. However, farming based on sensible wastelessness, smartness and respect for nature and your own health was also inherent to our grandparents and great-grandparents. We have decided to present a summary of the tips we have collected, which we hope will provide practical inspiration.

In our e-book, we cover a number of areas to support each other in living a lifestyle in which we don't waste food, don't spend unnecessarily on clothes, keep energy consumption under control and manage water wisely. And last but not least, we are also improving other small behavioural changes that will gradually reflect not only on our wallet but also on the future of the planet.



World Wide Fund for Nature - fontraising

2. 5. WE HELP CONSERVATIONISTS FROM WWF SLOVAKIA TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY

In 2022, we are honoured to have formed a partnership with one of the world's most respected brands that is a benchmark in conservation. We have donated a grant of EUR 50,000 from the VUB Foundation to WWF Slovakia. We were united by a unique project - activities aimed at connecting the Slovak landscape in order to improve conditions for animals from small pollinators to lynxes.

The impact of human intervention in the landscape often complicates the living conditions for animals. Natural areas lose their connectivity and can be likened to islands. If parts of our nature remain isolated, the species that live there will disappear. The diversity of nature will be reduced. **Thanks to the support of the VUB Foundation through the Connected Landscapes project, conservationists from WWF Slovakia are trying to modify selected places to create suitable conditions for life.**

One of the WWF's key activities in Slovakia is the protection of our rare predators - lynx. In this context, experts are working to improve the condition of two biocorridors, especially in places where animal paths intersect with ours and where unwanted collisions occur as a result. This has even led to the death of lynxes, of which there are now only about 200 to 300 living in the wild in Slovakia. Biocorridors not only protect against direct death of animals under the wheels of cars, but also connect parts of nature, ensuring migration and exchange of genetic material of animals and thus reducing the likelihood of their threat of degeneration of populations. The lack of connectivity of natural areas is also one of the causes of the decline of some butterfly species, and the creation of suitable habitats for pollinators can naturally contribute to reversing these changes.

Sometimes little is enough to improve the survival chances of the tiny inhabitants of the insect kingdom - all it takes is for people to know what they can do for them. This is what we are trying to do in the Connected Landscapes project, together with WWF ecologists. One way is to create inspiring examples of pollinator care in different environments - in the city, in the solitude under a mountain and in places surrounded by fields. Bees can also be helped by each of us if we grow suitable native meadow flowers, especially in our area. WWF conservationists are developing this theme not only in the field, but also in the space of our bank. To this end, they organized several lectures for our colleagues, which were full of useful advice.

In the interest of bee protection, we have declared our 'fontraising'

We also helped to raise additional financial support for WWF's work for bees and other pollinators in Slovakia through our own campaign. We decided to spread the call for donations through WWF's donation system in connection with the idea of an original font made of leftover beeswax, which we produced with our creative agency TRIAD. We have converted the unique typography into an electronic version for use in text editors. And to everyone who decided to contribute any amount to the WWF Slovakia system via the campaign website www.fontprevcely.sk, we sent this font as a joint thank you on behalf of our bees. The funds raised by this „fontraising“ were attached to a project of planting fruit trees and shrubs, planting flowering meadows in at least three different locations in Slovakia.



WWF (photo from a respondent's archive)

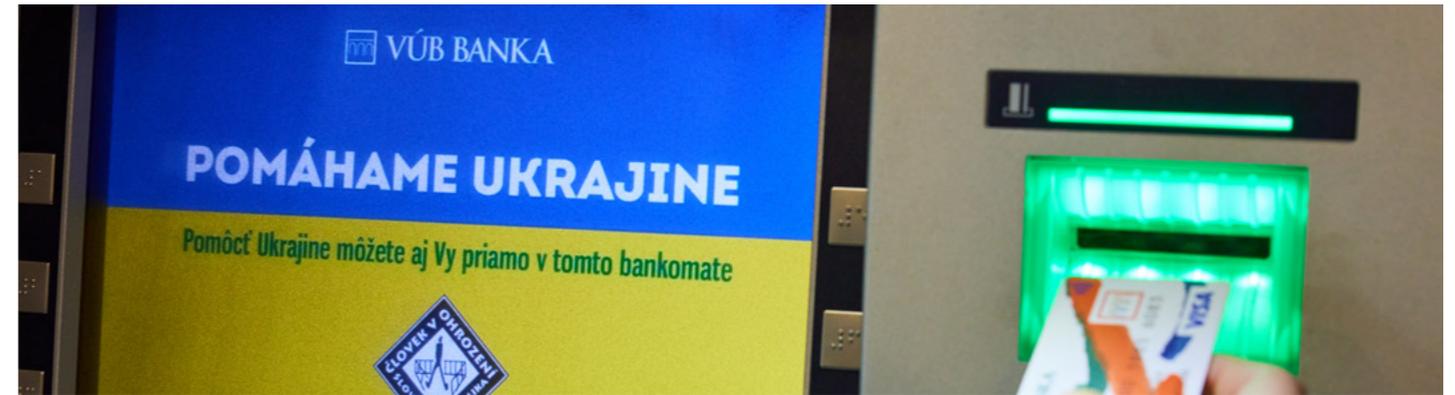
2. 6. WE JOINED THE AID TO OUR NEIGHBOURS FLEEING WAR

The situation that occurred in February beyond our eastern borders has once again become a serious test for the whole society. Like most companies in Slovakia, we at VUB joined the joint effort to help the people from Ukraine. We can say with a clear conscience that we have put our hands, head and heart to work to the best of our ability under the circumstances. We acted as individuals, families, colleagues and citizens of this state, and we thank all those who were and still are with us.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, which unleashed an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Europe, our first thoughts and actions were directed towards our Ukrainian colleagues at our sister bank Pravex. Literally within hours, we created a team of VUB volunteers who, with their own resources and in their own time, helped dozens of colleagues and their family members to get to safety, to have a place to live to start with, to find their way in a new environment and to get the necessary documents for a longer stay in Slovakia or a further transfer to Italy within the Intesa Sanpaolo banking group. To help even more, we also set up an internal fundraiser among our employees, which resulted in EUR 17,000 in financial aid for our colleagues from Ukraine. This was supplemented by the proceeds of a material collection, also organised among willing VUB donors.

The next step we took to join the mass movement of aid for people fleeing the war was an immediate **donation from the VUB Foundation of EUR 50,000** to the organizations Man in Peril and WellGiving. The coordinators of Man in Peril used these funds on the ground in the first weeks and months of the war for the most needed purpose - providing safe and warm shelter and psychosocial support, especially for the incoming women with children. The support also covered the necessary transportation of volunteers who helped at the border. WellGiving channeled the funding equally effectively, working directly with the Red Cross to provide logistical support to villages near the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

Our bank's clients could easily have been involved in the collection to support the work of People in Peril. All they had to do was to go to the nearest VUB ATM and send a pre-selected amount of money



Fundraising carried out through VUB ATMs in support of Ukraine

from their account through it. We are proud that in the 100 days since the outbreak of the war, **VUB clients have sent more than EUR 100,000 to help families from Ukraine.** These funds went not only to the border to the established detention tents, but also to the Ukrainian region of Zakarpattia, where it was relatively safe at that time and where around 400,000 Ukrainian women, Ukrainians and their children from all over the country found refuge.

The heavy responsibility to care for thousands of refugees has been on the shoulders of cities and municipalities since the beginning of the crisis. That is why **we offered municipalities to set up and maintain transparent accounts free of charge**, which they could use for various forms of fundraising to help people from Ukraine. Non-profit and non-governmental organizations could also apply for this form of cooperation, which had transparent accounts with us free of charge for 6 months. Last but not least, **we have simplified the process of opening free current accounts for Ukrainian neighbours themselves.** We wanted to make it easier for them to use their money as soon as they arrived. Last but not least, we also supported **Schooltogo, a summer school for Ukrainian children**, which helped children, especially from the occupied regions, to catch up on their missed lessons through accelerated learning.

The parent group of VUB Intesa Sanpaolo provided EUR 200,000 to Slovakia for food and psychological aid

During the peak of the omicron pandemic wave at the turn of winter and spring, our parent group Intesa Sanpaolo significantly supported the Slovak healthcare sector. Funds worth EUR 200,000 went to the regions of Slovakia and were used to provide food parcels for more than 12,000 people, psychological support, as well as material equipment for health professionals in the framework of post-covid assistance in hospitals. This assistance also benefited people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, many of whom were crossing the border into Slovakia at the time due to an extremely difficult and stressful situation in poor health. The funds from this aid project were directly transferred to OZ WellGiving. It used them to cover the current needs in the society in the beginning of spring in cooperation with the team behind the Who Will Help Slovakia initiative.

2. 7. WE BELIEVE IN A BETTER FUTURE FOR GIRLS

Even little girls have big dreams, they dream big because they can. In today's world, they have many possibilities and we believe they can aim high. That's why we have become the initiator, sponsor and main partner of the Inspiring Girls Slovakia project, which inspires young girls to believe in themselves when choosing a career in the future.



Lecture at a primary school about the Inspiring Girls Slovakia project

The unique international Inspiring Girls programme connects girls with inspiring women from diverse backgrounds who show them the full range of careers and opportunities in life. We are glad that this global programme has come to Slovakia thanks to the support of VUB Bank and our country has already become the thirtieth participating country.

According to the OZ Ženský Algoritmus (Female Algorithm), which in Slovakia, thanks to us, represents this initiative, girls around the world feel a lack of self-confidence and limited access to female role models. The self-esteem of girls aged 8-14 drops by up to 30%. All of this negatively impacts their mental wellbeing, future careers and ability to shape their own lives. This is where the Inspiring Girls programme makes sense - it brings girls into contact with positive female role models and teaches them that their lives and careers are not determined by gender stereotypes, but by their own ambitions, dreams and work on themselves.

By the end of 2022, the association has already managed to organize 16 lectures in schools with our support, which were attended by almost 300 girls and boys. They were able to meet successful female managers from the fields of automotive, IT or project management, for example, who drew them into their story and a discussion about how they imagine their dream job. We are ready to continue to support this programme and look forward to growing the number of young people who are moved on in their lives by these inspiring encounters.

DID YOU KNOW?

What research has shown:

- up to 67% of girls aged 11 to 21 think that women do not have the same opportunities as men,
- 30% of girls aged 11 to 16 think science and technology subjects are for boys only, and
- up to 55% of girls aged 7 to 21 say that gender stereotypes prevent them from saying what they think.

How girls rate the meaning of the Inspiring Girls programme:

- 70% of girls think differently about their future after meeting a positive female role model,
- 93 % of girls say that following influential and successful women on social media increases their personal and career aspirations,
- after meeting a female role model from a science and technology background, the likelihood of a girl deciding to pursue a career in this field increases twofold.

2. 8. WE ARE NOT SLOWING DOWN IN HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE

We want to be an organisation based on humanity. We are aware that, especially in today's uncertain times, our part in helping the weakest and smallest around us is of irreplaceable importance. Special banking products and services with a social overlap and partnerships with active organizations to help people who are dependent on others, give us a great deal of energy, hope and joy.

The **Good Angel** system helps families with children where the father, mother or child is suffering from cancer, or the child is battling another terminal illness, and the family is therefore in financial need, with regular monthly contributions. VUB Bank has been a partner of Good Angel since 2007 and we are proud to remain the **largest angel company in Slovakia** over the long term. Among the initiatives of the non-profit sector that help people in need, we have the longest and strongest alliance with this organization. We are the first and so far the only bank that has created a unique product and a major source of financial support for this purpose through the Maestro Good Angel debit card. It costs the clients themselves nothing at all. The way the aid works is that we make a contribution from the bank's own resources from all monthly card payments on behalf of the clients. This currently amounts to 0.2% of the payments made, and VUB Bank will provide up to EUR 350,000 for the families of cancer patients in 2022.

For several years we have been supporting through our foundation the projects of **Vagus**, an organization that has been helping **homeless people** for a long time. Thanks to our financial support, they are able to address in particular the activities of *the Domec project*, housing support - *Housing first* and also social services. Even our colleagues at our parent bank Intesa Sanpaolo liked this project and provided them with generous funding through their *Charity Fund*. As a part of our support, we were also a part of an exceptional public event, **Night Out**. In order to spread awareness and solidarity with homeless people, OZ Vagus traditionally convenes people in this way to spend a night outdoors with them. The group sleepover took place on 1 December in the area of Nová Cvernovka and included a discussion about the spread of poverty in Slovakia and also practical help for homeless people, with an emphasis also on the prevention of housing loss.

Young people with disabilities swim for their dreams

Svätopluk Pacák's son Radomír was born with cerebral palsy. The doctor told the parents that the boy would never walk. Naturally, the parents wished that Rado could be as independent as possible in life. So far, he has had three orthopedic surgeries and regular rehabilitation sessions, along with which he also enjoys swimming. In this type of sport, the earth's gravity does not act to its full extent and the body is supercharged with water. Not to mention the good effect on health. Rado became active in paraswimming, became a representative of the Slovak Paralympic Committee and participated twice in the European Championships. The story of his son with a serious diagnosis inspired his father to establish a centre for swimmers with disabilities, which he wants to open the way to swimming for other children and young people with disabilities.

The VUB Foundation also supported the activities of the Paraswimming without Limits Centre in Bratislava with its grant. Talented swimmers with disabilities can thus be provided with the rent of the swimming lane, the activities of the coach and can partially cover the expenses for their training. The story of the centre and the achievements of the young paraswimmers is also presented in [our article](#) in the Srdcovky magazine.



The Good Angel organization has been helping people with cancer for a long time



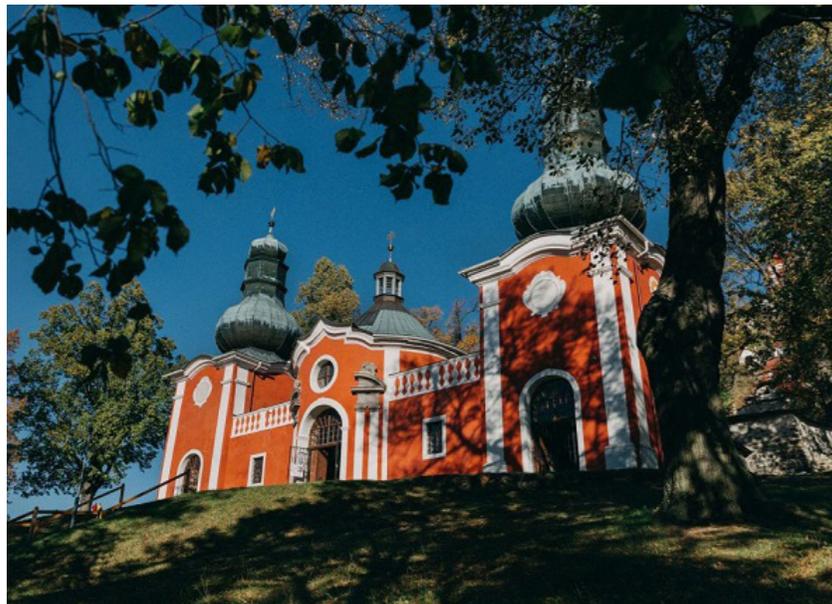
The VUB Bank Foundation supports Vagus, an organization that helps the homeless

2. 9. WE HAVE A FEELING FOR ART - BOTH HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY



**POKLADY
SLOVENSKA**

The link between art, VUB Bank and the VUB Foundation has long been strong. For many years we have helped to gradually bring back to life one of the greatest icons of cultural heritage in Slovakia - the Calvary in Banská Štiavnica. For 13 years we have been supporting the preservation of smaller historical gems through the Treasures of Slovakia initiative. And we help not only to protect art, but also to develop it. Our Painting Competition, aimed at raising the profile of young artistic talent, which we have organised for the 17th time this year, gives an idea of this.



The Calvary in Banská Štiavnica was renovated thanks to the VUB Foundation

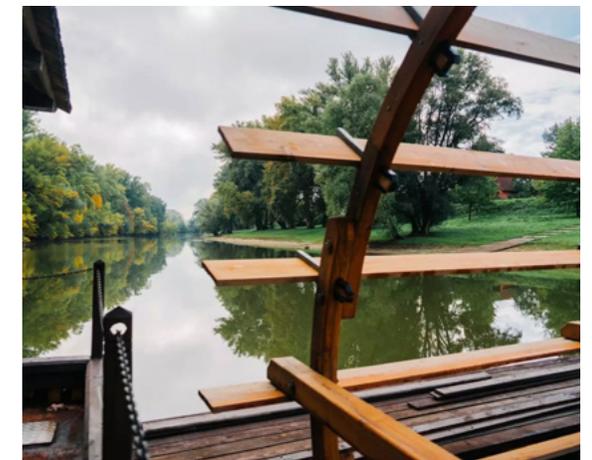
We are proud that the VUB Foundation is one of the largest supporters of the restoration of the dilapidated cultural heritage in Slovakia. Almost 25,000 Slovaks sent their votes in our voting competition **Treasures of Slovakia**, through which we have been helping to revive historical objects and works of art for a long time, but also to talk about their importance and value for the whole society. The winning monument among the 9 finalists this time was the unique ship mill in Kolárovo. Thanks to the support of the people in the public vote and our grant of EUR 30,000, the only technical monument of its kind in Slovakia is being preserved for future generations.

Remembrance of the life of millers on the rivers lives on

Ship mills, i.e. floating mills, were quite widespread in the past on the territory of Žitný ostrov. After World War II, however, they disappeared from our rivers. The only technical monument documenting the special way of using water energy to power the mill equipment from the middle of the river is located in the area of the peninsula, bordered by the Váh and the dead arm of the Little Danube. The mill structure is carried by two large barges connected by footbridges, between which is a mill wheel with blades catching the widest possible flow of water. A wooden covered bridge provides access to the building, which today functions as a museum of water milling.

However, destructive storms a few years ago damaged the heart of the mill - the wheel, which is the dominant feature of this now national cultural monument. The managers of the monument were forced to dismantle it, because the destroyed support shaft of the wheel threatened the statics and safety of the entire floating device. The mill was without this key component for almost two years. However, the Kolárovo Watermill Association did everything possible to make the mill completely accessible to visitors. As a result of their efforts, the mill won the Treasures of Slovakia competition, which was voted for by people from the surrounding area who consider the mill to be a landmark of their region. Thanks to a grant from the VUB Foundation, the entire mill wheel was reconstructed and the sides of the ship were also treated.

You can read the report from the visit of this unique technical monument in our magazine [Srdcovky](#).



Water mill in Kolárovo (photo by Magdaléna Tomalová)



The winner of the Painting 2022 competition, Ján Bátorek

Ján Bátorek, Samuel Kollárik and Martina Červenková have joined this year's list of the best painters of the emerging generations, which is written in Slovakia by the initiative **the Painting (Mal'ba) - VUB Foundation Award for Painting for Young Artists**. The three young artists were awarded with a public honour by an international jury and also with financial support for the development of their work in the total amount of EUR 20,000. During its 17th edition, the Painting Competition (Mal'ba) drew attention exceptionally to a fourth name - Sara Zahorjanova, who received a special credit from the jury. Of the 109 young male and female painters participating in this year's competition, as many as 40 new names have emerged. Eight debutants made it to the final twenty - including no fewer than three of this year's award-winning artists. We are delighted that we have once again helped not only to open the doors to up-and-coming talent with this competition, but also to bring first-class modern art closer to the people. The competition is accompanied by an exhibition of the works of the 20 finalists in the Nedbalka Gallery, which we have also made available again in a virtual form through [our website](#).

„The Residential boy“ Ján Bátorek

The winner of the Painting (Mal'ba) 2022 competition Ján Bátorek grew up in Čadca in Kysuce and now lives and works in Prague. He leaves his unmistakable handwriting on his canvases. This is characterised by lost worlds in which he mixes the aesthetics of bubblegum stickers, Lynchian surrealism and punk aesthetics with his own demons. He makes no secret of the fact that he was bewitched as a child by Ferdo Mravec as rendered by Ondřej Sekora, which is also evident in his paintings.

The artistic journey of the graduate of the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica has gone through several waves, but recently it has been on an upward trend. Thanks to Ján's perseverance, interest in his works is increasing, curators and other artists begin to notice him. He has managed to win three open gallery callies and most recently, winning 1st place in our foundation's competition has been one of his greatest achievements. He managed to do so after six previously submitted entries and two of those finishing in the final twenty. This year's international jury was clearly won over by Ján Bátorek with his work *The Residential Boy (Sídliškový chlapec)*. The author describes it as being made up of a mix of aesthetics that form the basis of his personality.

You can read more about this work and Ján Bátorek's life journey - from his training as a chef through years of painting and sleeping in a small room to winning the Painting award (Mal'ba) - in the online magazine of the VUB [Srdcovky](#) Foundation.

2. 10. WE THINK ABOUT FINANCIAL SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SAFETY

We are fully aware that banks have an extremely high influence and responsibility in society. It is our duty to effectively manage our clients' finances. Hand in hand with this, it is a matter of course for us to talk about how it is necessary to keep our money under control so that we are better prepared for the future thanks to it.

The ability to handle finances wisely needs to be built from early childhood. We strive to be long-term partners for parents in this task. In order to develop children's financial literacy, our cooperation with *Bublina*, a popular entertainment and **educational magazine for children**, which is aimed at the first grade of primary school, i.e. children

from 6 to 11 years old, works well for us. Also during 2022, we featured a regular comic strip on why and how children should learn to save. Through engaging activities and games, children can learn, for example, the basics of what makes up a family budget, the link between work and pay, or what to do when they get their own pocket money.

Children also learn to farm via an app

Our new **VUB Junior Banking application** connected to the Junior Account is a practical solution that helps parents solve the issue of pocket money and teaches children to manage their money. They can use the app to request a unique virtual card that can be used to pay online, which helps them learn the principles of responsible and safe online shopping right from the start. This way, children have all their finances in one place, so they know exactly how much they can spend and when to save. Parents are in complete control - they approve the creation of the virtual card, keep track of transactions and can deactivate the app if the child loses their mobile phone.



The main characters Tomy and Fin from the online financial educational game Capitals

We know that the topic of financial literacy for children is being developed by many companies and is also being addressed directly in schools. That's why we are always looking for new ways to reach children and introduce them to the topic in a different way. So last year we created a playful e-learning course called **Capitals - Money by Playing with the Band**, which works [like a game on your computer or mobile phone](#). Its aim is to teach young players, through an engaging story, how to make good financial decisions in different life situations. The main character is a boy named Tomy who wants to start a band and make music. He is accompanied on his journey by his friend, Fin the dog, who explains through various interactive exercises how to save money for his dream and how to handle it. Another original element of the play is the collaboration with singer Tomáš Bezdeda, who composed and sang the theme song for the project. The game is mainly built for children aged 9 to 13, but everyone else can have fun with it for free.

On the occasion of **World Savings Day** at the end of October, we organised a competition for primary school classes in connection with our game. Up to 240 classes from all over Slovakia and

7,000 curious participants took part in the project. The winning 3 classes received 700 euros to buy school supplies or go on a school trip. Our activities in October were traditionally complemented by experiential learning in selected schools, which was taken care of by our colleagues from the bank. The content of this financial education was developed in cooperation with an initiative of our banking group, Intesa Sanpaolo. In Italy, thanks to its Museum of Savings in Turin, it is one of the largest organisers of various financial education activities for both children and adults, both in school and in leisure time.

In 2022, in cooperation with Radio Europa 2, we also brought a series of new podcasts called **Nebuď Ďuro**. Hosts Oliver Oswald and Samo Prochádzka led various debates aimed at a young audience, which focused on everyday money management and financial literacy and always included an expert from the bank. The podcasts can be listened to on Spotify, Apple Podcast and other podcast apps.



VÚB Bank's podcast Nebuď Ďuro about money and financial literacy



VÚB Bank covers the topic of safe investing in gaming

We spread the word about safety in online games

Ako aktívny partner Y-games - najväčšej a najsledovanejšej ligy v elektronických športoch na Slovensku – sme medzi komunitu gamerov priniesli aj špeciálnu tému o bezpečnosti v online hraní. V tejto cieľovej skupine je treba hovoriť o tom, aby sa hráči nenechali pri hraní online hier oklamať a neprišli o svoje peniaze. Okrem toho sme zašli aj do vŕd bezpečného investovania v rámci gamingu a elektronického ekosystému. S týmto cieľom sme pomohli vytvoriť reláciu VÚBsafePoint, kde sme dali priestor známym hosťom z ešportového biznisu a pripravili videá a články vysvetľujúce princípy investovania v prostredí gamingu.

3. OUR HANDS AND HEARTS FOR A GREENER AND BETTER WORLD

We are a bank whose value is not only created by its brand and financial assets. We are a living organism whose foundation is made up of people. Our impact, based on responsible stewardship of the bank's resources, is powerful. However, it is the personal commitment of our colleagues that gives the greatest meaning and emotion to VUB's socially beneficial mission. That is why it is they to whom we give the most care - so that we can share the positive energy we gain at work with the world around us.

FOR NATURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE EARTH

3. 1. WE FORM TEAMS OF VOLUNTEERS FOR A CLEANER NATURE

Manual work is a guaranteed cure for a healthier body and a happier spirit for office people. This is also our guiding principle when organising corporate volunteering activities, which have a long tradition at VUB. And as we all become more and more familiar with our green identity within the bank, our steps lead us first and foremost out into nature, where gloves, hoes and garbage bags become our working armour. The result we are left with is always worth it.

Our goal is to engage in volunteer activities for nature as a VUB team, within the limits of our capabilities and environment, regularly throughout the year. However, everyone is well suited to join their friends from work in this activity. That's why we organise larger events twice a year at the bank, where colleagues can choose from a range of different brigades and beneficial activities.

During the **spring part of the Green Days**, which took place in May, it was mainly colleagues from our headquarters who were able to get involved. The range of activities was varied - collection of trees, protection of protected plants, park landscaping, garbage collection, small construction works and many others. Cleaning and beautification of the environment took place in the Prüger-Wallner Garden, which we have been helping to revitalize systematically for a few years now, with the help of the VUB Foundation, and with our work teams we also started cleaning Koch's Garden, the surroundings of Devín Castle, the Forest Park

in Krasňany and the Vinosady community vineyard in Vajnory. We are proud that during the Spring Green Days, which we also organize in friendly cooperation with the Magistrate of the Capital City of Bratislava, nearly 100 volunteers from VUB decided to make a useful contribution.

Also in autumn, almost 150 VUB Bank employees took part in various activities as part of the **Volunteering Week**. They rolled up their sleeves and took part in several activities in different cities. In Bratislava, they managed to clean up the Devín forest trail, the community garden at the Rodina Centre, improve the surroundings of the Transport Museum and revitalise the vineyards in Vajnory. In Banská Bystrica our volunteers helped to create a recreational nature trail, under the Tatras they cleaned hiking trails in the TANAP forests and in Trenčín they revived a cherry orchard. Each activity included short workshops on various ecological topics.



The third year of the Week of Volunteering initiative



We live by the motto „Orange is the new green“

At VUB Bank, we have also launched a new long-term challenge since the beginning of 2022, whereby we have decided to regularly provide our colleagues with concrete tips on how to behave more environmentally friendly not only at work but also at home. With our new internal campaign *Orange is the new green*, we are jointly reaffirming that we are a green bank not only in words but especially in deeds.

Throughout the year, we focused on reducing paper and printing consumption, using more environmentally friendly modes of transport, saving water and energy, separating and reducing waste, using air conditioning more efficiently, and communicating with colleagues remotely more often without having to travel. We've helped put together a wealth of tips for inspiration at home too, as small steps in everyone's home will help improve eco-friendly behaviour for our entire banking team by leaps and bounds.

3. 2. WE GIVE GRANTS TO COLLEAGUES' GREEN IDEAS

One of the good traditions in our bank is also a grant program designed specifically to support community and environmental projects of non-profits, in which they also have an active share our colleagues from the VUB Group. In 2022, we redistributed funds from the VUB Foundation through this model for the 16th time. Another 13 ideas aimed at protecting nature and helping weaker people have been translated into reality.

Active colleagues working in various positions at VUB Bank all over Slovakia were able to reconnect with a friendly non-profit organization they support through volunteer work, or get together with other parents and do something useful at their children's school. Once again this year, it was fully evident that our team's desire to beautify and improve the world around them is not lacking. Eighty-seven civic associations, schools and municipalities participated in the 16th edition of the VUB Foundation *Employee Grant Programme*. Every single one was underwritten by the volunteer work of a colleague, colleague's colleague or an entire department.

The selection committee had a difficult task, but in the end it **selected 13 projects and distributed EUR 20,000** to them. However, these were only an „injection“ that helped to set things in motion, the success of the projects is mainly due to the time and energy that VUBkarians, their acquaintances, friends and neighbours invested in these projects. From spring to fall, our grant-supported projects across the country got underway. These include, for instance, looking after community gardens, the birds and animals that live around people's homes, planting new green oases and orchards, creating spaces for experiential learning for children and intergenerational gatherings, and colleague activities aimed at helping disadvantaged people.

Preschoolers live in harmony with nature in the club under the Bratislava Kamzík

The Waldkind Forest Club in the capital was founded by maternity mum Lucia Vérffy on the model of forest nurseries in Scandinavia. They are nurseries without walls and ceiling. In them, parents leave their children in nature away from the noise of the city throughout the day, regardless of the weather. This is also true of the stay of preschoolers from 3 to 6 years old in the nature above Bratislava, which leads them to independence, love for nature and themselves and fully prepares them for school.

Children can run around outside under adult supervision, climb trees, get dirty, they can do whatever their body wants. They learn to take responsibility for their own safety. Through their own experiences - falls and scrapes - they quickly understand their own limits and what is safe for them. Nature benefits children' bodies not only physically, but also mentally - it is scientifically proven that being in the woods helps to secrete hormones that put children in a state of well-being. Not to mention the sense of pride and respect for the wilderness that children gain for life.

We contributed to the operation of this project of a team of clever mothers with our green grant and its story was also featured in the magazine of the VÚB [Srdcovky](#) Foundation.



Forest nursery under the Kamzík hill (photo by Magdaléna Tomalová)



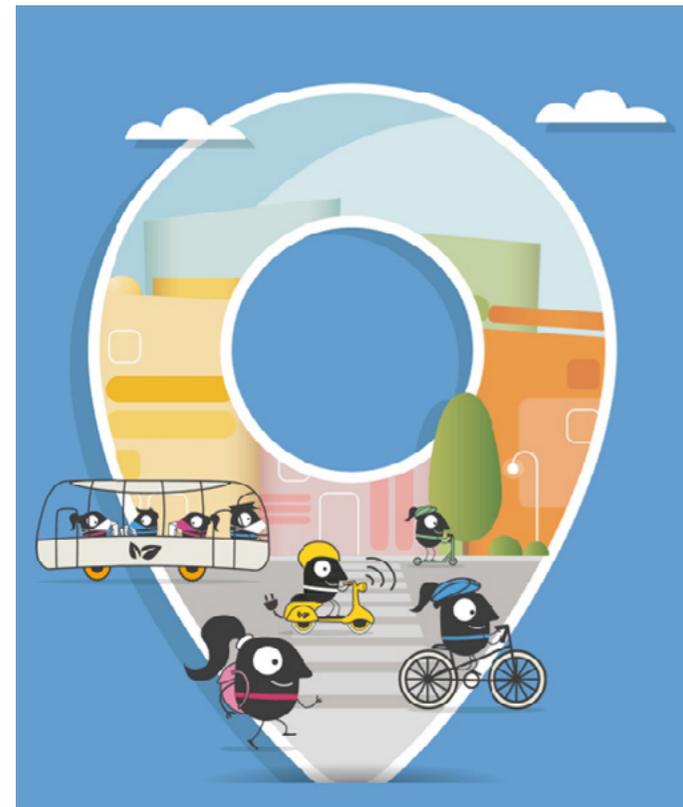
Iniciative Bike to work

3. 3. PULLING EACH OTHER TOWARDS GREEN BEHAVIOUR

A sense of ecology and sustainability is becoming a natural part of how we think and act in our offices and homes. This is evidenced by the other activities that our colleagues are keen to take on and the ideas they come up with themselves.

Two years ago, we invited all our colleagues, specialists in their respective fields, to come up with ideas and solutions on how to translate our principles declared in the VUB Green Manifesto into the life of individual departments of the bank. **We called this initiative EcoChampions** and in 2022 we successfully moved forward together. Every branch of the bank across Slovakia already has its own *EcoChampion*. These colleagues become active and enthusiastic ambassadors of banking improvements for the benefit of environmental protection, inspiring their teams of colleagues by their own example. They come up with useful ideas, collect good tips from their working environment and then share them with other branches and our headquarters.

As a bank, one of the ways in which we want to reduce our collective carbon footprint is to increasingly incentivise ourselves **to drive green to and from work**. That's why we do everything we can to ensure that our colleagues have good conditions and maximum convenience for using modes of transport other than their own cars - not just public transport, but especially bicycles and scooters. To this end, we are building a space at the bank's headquarters where you can safely store your transport means, but also take a shower or change into sports clothes. The bike-sharing system, which colleagues can borrow directly from the VUB headquarters, has also proved its worth. In fact, the promotion of active movement and community sports spirit is a strong



Campaign in support of the European Mobility Week



New electric cars

motivation for the promotion of green transport. In May, we collectively kicked off this year's cycling season by joining the nationwide Go to Work by Bike campaign, and the traditional cycling event in September as part of *European Mobility Week* was also a success. We are pleased to see the emergence of teams of colleagues in the bank who cycle regularly even out of working hours.

We also had a positive response to our internal communication initiative over the summer, sharing with colleagues various tips on how to take a well-deserved holiday a little greener and with a lower impact on the planet. And we did it without having to cut back significantly.

One of the other small steps we are taking as a bank for a better future is the **greening of our fleet**. In the autumn, in cooperation with VUB Operating Leasing, we purchased two smart electric cars - Smarts, which are intended for employees of our headquarters for short journeys around Bratislava. These two cars are just the beginning, more will be added in the future.

With mobile phone in hand for a greater experience of nature

Experiencing the beauty of nature first-hand, even during a casual stroll around your city - that's the idea of the clever app *Lesmír*, developed by the organisation of the same name. We are delighted to have become its main partner so that this digital guide to nature and nature trails in Slovakia can continue to grow. The app navigates you along the route of the selected trail and unlocks short interesting videos based on your location. They also include explanations by experts, animations, historical images of the landscape and shots of wild animals. Also thanks to the support of VUB, in 2022, nature trails in TANAP and also around Bratislava were included in the app. The Island of the Sun in the Sea of Time, Vydrica through the eyes of forest dwellers, Behind the Birdsong or the Danube, the artery of life - choose your route and see the world around you with different eyes.

3. 4. JOINING TOGETHER TO HELP FAMILIES IN NEED

VUB has a climate in which we motivate each other to help the less fortunate people around us. We are not indifferent to the stories of families struggling with financial problems and the strain on their physical and mental health. Every year we try to help as many parents as possible - often single parents - and especially their children, so that they can breathe a sigh of relief.

Before the spring holidays, we prepared an opportunity for our colleagues to participate in the **Easter Hope project**. VUB employees provided food packages for 51 families from all over Slovakia. People from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, mothers and fathers who are single parents of their children, families caring for a sick member for a long time, or families where parents have lost their jobs or have become victims of domestic violence, could feel a little relief at Easter. Packages with basic foodstuffs and also goodies, which they could not otherwise afford from their family budget, were delivered directly to their door by our partner - farmlove.sk, a farmer's e-shop.

For the third time, colleagues from the bank also took part in the **Christmas Helpers from VUB** campaign and bought children whose parents were in a difficult life situation what they most wanted to find under the Christmas tree. In record time after the an-

nouncement, each story found its donor. Almost 80 children from over 50 families received the desired toys, building blocks, books, sports equipment, musical instruments and clothes. They received everything they asked for in their letter addressed to Ježiško.

We also make life easier for parents with a special banking product

Last year, we introduced a new product for parents who take care of the household full-time and work at the same time - a loan for anything up to EUR 10,000 with a discounted interest rate and zero origination fee. Working mums and dads can arrange our **Mama Loan** at any VUB branch.

3. 5. WE SUPPORT THE MENTAL HEALTH AND CRITICAL THINKING OF OUR COLLEAGUES

For the past three years, each of us has been experiencing uncertainty of a kind we are not used to - be it health risks, security threats or concerns about the economic security of ourselves and our families. Talking about mental health today is as essential as worrying about physical health. We pay close attention to this area - we work as a team to encourage each other and create opportunities in collaboration with professionals that are a relief and a boost to the soul.

At VUB Bank, we were at the birth of the **Coalition of Companies for Mental Health** and became a partner of the League for Mental Health. As a result, colleagues have free access through our VUB Academy platform to a wide range of discussions and materials backed by experts and coaches from the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, mental development, counselling and intervention services and psychiatry. Their aim is to untabulate and speak openly about the things that we are deep down troubled by and which, if we bottled up inside, can cause long-term damage to our physical health too.

We also try to create a climate where there is no shame in asking questions and protecting your mental health through regular **lectures and discussions with experts**. Their themes

also follow the societal events - starting with the peak of the pandemic at the beginning of the year and continuing with the biggest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War and its related security and economic consequences. Among the experts with whom it was possible to hold an open discussion were, for example, leading infectologist Peter Sabaka and psychologist and crisis intervention specialist Lucia Vargová Ištvániková.

We also adhere to the old-known truth „in a healthy body a healthy spirit“ by including **physical exercise in our work schedule**. Pilates, yoga, power stretching or body balance - all of these activities are available to VUB headquarters employees in our building in the morning before work or at lunchtime. This saves them time and money, and helps many

TÝŽDNE DUŠEVNÉHO ZDRAVIA

- Zaujímavé prednášky o duševnom zdraví
- Možnosť vyskúšať si sedenie s psychológom
- Hodina terapie zadarmo



In 2022, a new initiative for VÚB employees called Bank with a Soul was launched

of them stick to their commitment to themselves, as this exercise has become an enjoyable and useful routine for their working days.

One of the prerequisites for mental well-being is the ability to think critically. At a time when negative news is pouring in on us daily from all sides, how we evaluate it is crucial. That's why we've **included experts from the Critical Thinking Academy** in a series of online training courses for employees. Critical thinking is neither a skill nor a practical toolkit. It's an approach to the world. The goal of critical thinking is wisdom - a sensitive examination of how we think, make decisions, and act in our relationships with other people. Long gone are the days when it was enough to have knowledge. We need to focus on building skills to be able to adapt to new stimuli and to grow continuously, knowing that the challen-

ges ahead will be unrelenting. Conversations with top experts in critical thinking, based on the context of the post-Covidian era, addressed the art of being able to respond practically in challenging situations and to recognize so-called cognitive fallacies - or in other words, errors of the mind. As part of honing their thinking skills, they also took part in interactive exercises via the Brainee app.

In 2022, we also brought in a brand new internal program to boost employee mental health, **Bank with Soul**. This programme includes the possibility to arrange a free meeting with a psychologist, the organisation of several lectures and also comprehensive direct help for all employees from all over Slovakia in cooperation with the ksebe.sk platform. The latter facilitates the connection between people and professionals in all areas of mental health.

We give online help space for the soul

Back in 2021, in cooperation with the League for Mental Health, we became the initiator and main partner of the educational podcast How Are You?, which has found a significant place in the online space. The project has been a huge success and we have continued it in 2022. We are pleased that more and more people, not only our colleagues from the bank, regularly follow the topics raised by the presenter Peter „Šarkan“ Novák and his guests. The podcast wants to be more than just a collection of stories of people who have overcome or are currently struggling with adversity. It also brings a deeper insight into what is currently happening in the field of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers and other helping professions. It is therefore of benefit both to people struggling with mental health problems, their family members and also professionals working in this field. An archive of all the topics and interviews can be found [on this page](#)

We opened the VUB Cafeteria

We appreciate the people who have decided to devote their time, skills and energy to VUB Bank. In order to further reward their loyalty, respect diversity and recognise their individuality, last year we introduced a new benefits model for our employees. It is set up to reconcile work and personal life even more effectively. We called it VUB Cafeteria and it works as an online platform, similar to an e-shop, through which colleagues can exchange their allocated points for the services and things that make them happiest. Alongside this, we have also strengthened the most important benefits, which relate to opportunities to use extra days of paid time off. And we want to actively encourage employees to use them to take better care of their mental and physical health.



VÚB Bank has been cooperating with the League for Mental Health for many years

4. OUR ETHICAL MANAGEMENT

Any work done well and professionally to benefit the planet and society would not ultimately bear its true fruit if it were not built on solid principles of ethical self-management. At VUB, we therefore protect above all else our adherence to internal rules and processes that combine sustainability with transparency, honesty and fairness to all employees and partners.

4. 1. FOR US, CODES OF ETHICS AND INCLUSION ARE MORE THAN JUST RULES ON PAPER

If we at VUB only followed the regulations set by the law and public authorities, we would be a bank without a soul. As people and professionals, we need to set the highest standards because they move us forward and ultimately benefit our relationships - in working with our colleagues and also with our clients and suppliers.

VUB Bank has a strict code of ethics, which is one of the pillars of our corporate culture and is based on the code of ethics of the entire parent group Intesa Sanpaolo. This sets internal policies and rules that say a clear „no“ to any discrimination or self-enrichment and, on the contrary, fully support all forms of diversity from which the whole can benefit, constructive and fair conflict resolution with an emphasis on conflict prevention, or complete openness in pointing out possible dishonesty and non-compliance with the rules.

The Code of Ethics is followed by a corporate **anti-corruption programme** with specific systemic and organisational measures, including an internal audit control system. Our rules imply the fundamental principle of zero tolerance for possible corruption and fraud, including the inevitable consequences.

We also protect our clients and the bank itself with our anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism system by **detecting unusual business transactions**. Strict internal rules in this regard include our policy of non-armament financing, our policy of managing relations with political parties or client relationships and transactions to and from risky countries.

VUB Bank is openly committed to promoting inclusion and diversity, which is why we are proud ambassadors of the nationwide initiative **Diversity Charter Slovakia**. By signing our name, we have confirmed our commitment, which has been consistently fulfilled until now, to continuously develop a working environment for the bank's employees based on openness, fairness, pluralism and trust. To this end, we also regularly review and communicate our internal Diversity and Inclusion Policy so that all colleagues feel that their diverse talents, qualities and beliefs are welcomed, recognised and valued.

4. 2. COMING TOGETHER TO DO MORE

We don't want to go it alone in pursuit of the goals for a sustainable future that matter to us. We want to continue to expand our network of professional partners working on environmental and social sustainability and responsibility, to support each other in the activities that bring us together, to use the knowledge we have gained to guide the Bank's strategic direction and, last but not least, to spread good practice examples further.

We are proud that in September 2021 we became one of the main initiators of a common agenda of banks in Slovakia within the **Slovak Banking Association**, which we called the **Memorandum on Sustainable Business and Development**. For us, the Memorandum represents a significant public commitment to jointly adhere to the ESG principles in our business activities, which we develop in relation to state authorities and institutions, employees, clients, business partners, the entire society and, last but not least, the environment and the entire planet.

In 2021, VUB Bank also joined the **Fund for Transparent Slovakia**, which is an inspiring initiative of socially responsible companies. Their aim is to financially and non-financially support “watchdog” and analytical organisations, to control compliance with laws and ethical standards, to improve the business environment, to increase transparency and reduce corruption, to save public resources and to help kick-start changes, for example, in increasing the chances of better law enforcement. With this step, we have naturally built on our long-standing active work within the Pontis Foundation **Business Leaders Forum** platform.

We are also a member of the **Circular Slovakia** platform - a public-private platform to promote the circular economy. Our common goal is to bring together companies and businesses, government and knowledge institutions, associations and NGOs to accelerate the transition to a greener Slovakia. Our main role within this platform is to make green and sustainable financing options more accessible. In this context, we have participated in several webinars in 2022 and have been at the launch of new types of services and tools that will practically help with the circular transformation of business models of companies in Slovakia.

Slovak Global Network (SGN) is a digital platform connecting companies, individuals and institutions for the good of Slovakia and our bank has been a stable part of it for two years. We are glad that in this way we can join forces with committed professionals from various sectors, innovative entrepreneurs and young people who feel social responsibility towards their country. The purpose of the platform is to bring together and connect a network of Slovaks at home and abroad and thus increase the visibility of Slovak projects and initiatives based on sustainability. With this aim in mind, we participated as partners in the international summit of the platform last June.

OTHERS TALK ABOUT THE RESULTS OF OUR EFFORTS

- For the second year in a row, VUB has become the best bank in Slovakia, the result of the 29th annual Best Bank Awards of the prestigious US magazine **Global Finance**. **The Best Bank in Slovakia 2022** award was decided by an international jury and the magazine's economic experts.
- One of the largest investment companies in the world, J.P. Morgan awarded VUB Bank the prestigious **Elite Quality Recognition Award** in recognition of the quality of its payment processing. This award reflects the management of our payment orders that meet precisely defined automated processing requirements, making it safer, cheaper and faster to process client payments.
- Our bank regularly ranks among the TOP companies awarded in Profesia's **Best Employer** survey. In the tenth year of this public vote, we ranked **3rd** in the Banking, Finance and Insurance category.
- We are a proud part of the Slovak community of companies associated with the SmartHead platform and through our public profile on its website we regularly and transparently communicate our activities and inspire other companies working towards a greener future together. For our commitment, we made it to **the 1st place in the SmartHead Awards 2022 in the Most Active Companies** ranking.
- The awards for our banking products and services also give us energy for further work. In 2022, we won two awards for best credit card product setup and innovative approach in communication in the **Mastercard Awards**. Our VUB Mobile Banking app defended its position among the best apps in the **NAY Techbox Banking App of the Year** poll. We also finished on the winner's podium in the prestigious **Smart Bank** poll, which is sponsored by the **mojandroid.sk** portal and in which readers and the editorial team search for banks with the best banking and smart functionalities in Slovakia.

