

VILLUM FONDEN

Planting the seeds for a greener and brighter future - Digital, green, and inclusive initiatives in Czechia and Slovakia

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Nine projects are on a mission to boost the enthusiasm of young minds for education and equip them to take an active part in the green and digital transformation. From vocational schools enhancing students' digital and green skills to NGOs providing mentorship for vulnerable youth in Roma communities, it's a dynamic initiative. Villum Foundation is supporting these projects with 100 million DKK under the grant area European Youth and Education.

In the Czech town Frydek-Mistek, Czechia, students and teachers at the vocational school are teaming up to create a green technology park for both education and leisure. In Bratislava, Slovakia, a school is pioneering a new kind of technical vocational training, where traditional lectures take a backseat to student-led projects. They plan to spread the project-oriented method to a third of the vocational schools nationally.

"The digital and green shift demands that Europe's youth develop skills to navigate new technologies in everyday life and at work. They must turn their knowledge into clever solutions for a greener, more sustainable society. That's basically what we're supporting via the EVI program. It's a fantastic blend of education, innovation, and social impact." says Agi Csonka, Villum Foundation's program director.

Other EVI-granted projects aim to support the most socially vulnerable children and youth who often drop out of the education system. In several Slovak cities, organizations are launching mentorship programs, establishing recreation centers for Roma children, and offering scholarships to motivate, develop skills, and keep them in education.

Unconventional partnerships create change

In several projects, new partnerships are built up. In Brno, Czechia, a technical vocational school, that partners up with a Danish consortium of schools, and a consulting firm specializing in green transformation, is creating educational modules to strengthen students' green and digital skills. "The project has great support from regional authorities and the business sector," explains Agi Csonka. "We expect the new education experiences to spread to other Czech vocational schools."

In Slovakia, the Open Future project is expanding a 3-year pilot program introducing socially vulnerable children (aged 11-15) to new digital technologies, soft skills, and entrepreneurship in a new type of creative training center. Through project-based learning and guidance from mentors in business and the public sector, these children and youngsters are equipped to make positive changes in their communities.

"Our long-term goal is to create a program that helps reduce social and economic disparities among children. By combining technology workshops with support from municipalities and businesses, children can respond to a changing world and society's challenges," shares Martina Kolesarova, director of Nadácia Pontis, the project's initiator.

The funding will be used to establish a network of innovative technology centers, serving 8 municipalities and 8 schools, involving 490 children in Slovakia. The program will also be accessible to teachers, students, and NGOs throughout the rest of Slovakia.