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## **IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING OF PROJECTS FOCUSED ON NON-FORMAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

### **Summary**

Environmental protection is a fundamental process that requires urgent changes in people's behavior. On this basis, environmental education is currently one of the actual areas of education and the funding of these activities is an extremely important area in this process. One of the possibilities is the Green Education Fund, which supports the development of environmental education, upbringing and awareness in the Slovak Republic. The paper is focused on the evaluation of the Green Education Fund as the funding opportunity for environmental education in Slovakia. Based on the available data, which include the first two calls of the Green Education Fund, we evaluated data on applicants for support from this fund, the amount of financial contribution, location of selected projects, supported and rejected projects and evaluated the course of the first two calls of this fund.

**Key words:** environmental protection, environmental education, funding of environmental education, Green Education Fund.

## **REALIZACJA I FINANSOWANIE PROJEKTÓW UKIERUNKOWANYCH NA NIEFORMALNĄ EDUKACJĘ EKOLOGICZNĄ**

### **Streszczenie**

Ochrona środowiska to podstawowy proces, który wymaga pilnych zmian w zachowaniu ludzi. Na tej podstawie edukacja ekologiczna jest obecnie jednym z rzeczywistych obszarów edukacji, a finansowanie tych działań jest niezwykle ważnym obszarem w tym procesie. Jedną z możliwości jest Green Education Fund, który wspiera rozwój edukacji ekologicznej, wychowania i świadomości w Republice Słowackiej. Artykuł koncentruje się na ocenie Green Education Fund jako możliwości finansowania edukacji ekologicznej na Słowacji. Na podstawie dostępnych danych, które obejmują dwa pierwsze nabory Green Education Fund, dokonaliśmy oceny danych wnioskodawców ubiegających się o wsparcie z tego funduszu, wysokości wkładu finansowego, lokalizacji wybranych projektów, projektów wspieranych i odrzuconych oraz oceniliśmy przebieg pierwszych dwóch naborów do tego funduszu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ochrona środowiska, edukacja ekologiczna, finansowanie edukacji ekologicznej, Green Education Fund.

### **Introduction**

The term environmental education in the broadest sense represents an institutionalized way of transferring knowledge about the environment and thus shapes the overall morale of the relationship between man, society and nature (Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2015). We classify environmental, ecological or green education into the area of lifelong learning. It is a comprehensive education and covers many areas. These are natural, social, geographical and technical relations between man and the environment (Fryková, 2010).

According to Fazekašová (2007), environmental education is the education of an individual whose value system enables him to act wisely and sensitively in favor of the protection and conservation of biodiversity in all its forms, who will be able to sympathize with nature and other living creatures and who will be willing to take responsibility for his actions. Its main goal is to educate each of us so that we have a responsible approach to nature. In order for people, and especially children, to become a part of nature, they need vital and personal contact so that they can be a part of it (Jančaříková, 2010). Environmental education has an interdisciplinary character. In order to meet its own goals, it also requires knowledge from other scientific disciplines. Therefore, we consider it to be a cross-cutting theme (Pencáková, 2016). Procházková (2013) states that environmental education is a prerequisite for supporting behavioral change and the acquisition of competencies that are necessary to achieve sustainable development. Environmental education should be part of a broader concept of moral education, as such education leads to the ability to think autonomously morally, to autonomously assess the situation and to autonomously take responsibility for acting in favor of good (Platková Olejárová, 2010).

The Slovak Republic's focus on environmental education and upbringing also resulted from its membership in several international and European institutions, which is linked to several international conceptual documents and legal bases, related, among other things, to the addressed issues (Fančová, 2006).

We divide financial resources intended for environmentally oriented education into two basic groups according to the Departmental Conception of Environmental Education up to 2025 (Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2015):

- public sources of state administration and state funds (The Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and Environmental Fund),
- EU structural funds (cross-border, national and interregional cooperation programs, other grant and support programs).

In addition to public financial resources, private financial resources are also spent to address the issue, in the form of foundations, corporate philanthropy, fundraising or 2% corporate and personal income tax allocation.

The paper is focused on the Green Education Fund (GEF), which is established within the Slovak Environment Agency based on the decision of the Minister of the Environment of the Slovak Republic. Its purpose is to support the development of environmental education and awareness in the territory of the Slovak Republic through the promotion of the principles of joint responsibility and direct support of selected activities. Eligible applicants for support from the fund are non-governmental organizations, civic associations and foundations with a scope of activities of more than 2 years, which have environmental education and awareness activities in their subject. The fund's income consists of donated funds provided on the basis of a donation contract, where, in addition to the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, private entities also make a significant contribution. The themes of calls for support change every year. After two successful GEF calls, its third year is currently being finalized (Green Education Fund, 2019; Green Education Fund, 2020).

## 1. Materials and Methods

The paper focuses on the evaluation of the Green Education Fund as a possibility of financing environmental education in Slovakia. Data on applicants, the amount of the financial contribution, the location of selected projects and supported and rejected projects are evaluated. The data used are obtained from the websites of the Green Education Fund, which provide information on calls and individual projects (Green Education Fund, 2019; Green Education Fund, 2020). Descriptive statistics methods are used in data processing and comparison, while SPSS Statistics 26 software was used for their processing. Using the obtained data on individual projects, a geographical analysis is performed, which consists in creating thematic maps using GIS software MapInfo Pro 16.0, while the thematic maps are used to visualize the number of supported and rejected projects within the first two calls of the GEF in individual districts. A box plot is used for graphical visualization of data on the amount of the requested financial contribution for supported and unsupported projects within the first two calls of the GEF.

## 2. Results

Within the GEF, 3 years were realized. As the third year is currently being finalized, the paper focuses mainly on the first 2 years. The first pilot year of GEF is also known by the abbreviation 1/2017. From October 20, 2017 to December 1, 2017, applications for support from this fund could be submitted for the first time. The approval of applications goes through various procedures, the basic one being the administrative control performed by the expert commission. The expert commission professionally evaluates each application and selects the best ones that go to the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic for confirmation. On 21 February 2018, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic approved the applications and subsequently published them all on the GEF website. Following the signing of the contract for support from the GEF, all planned projects had to be implemented by 30 April 2019 at the latest, and at the same time by 31 May 2019 they had to submit a final billing. For the first pilot year, the total allocation of funds was 155 200 €. A total of 44 applications were received by the GEF Secretariat. After the administrative control, 4 project plans were not approved. Subsequently, after consulting and adjustments by the professional evaluation, 40 project plans were submitted, from which the specialized members of the expert commission selected the best 28 project plans. The Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic approved them on 21 February 2018 and on 22 February 2018 they were published on the GEF website. Although 28 project plans were approved, 5 organizations did not draw financial support from the fund. A total of 23 project plans were supported in the amount of a financial contribution of 133 243.60 €. Table 1 shows the types of organizations that have applied for support from the fund.

Table 1

*Type of organization of applicants in 2017*

Type of organization	Applications received	Supported projects
Civic association	34	19
Interest association of legal entities	1	1
Foundation	2	0
Non-profit organization providing public services with an environmental focus	7	3

Source: Green Education Fund, 2019.

The activities of environmental upbringing, environmental education and awareness are supported within the GEF, while the applicant must choose to which category the project in question will belong. For each year, the topics of the calls on which the project intentions are to focus are also listed. They are shown in Table 2 for the first year of GEF.

Table 2  
*GEF topics for 2017*

<b>Topics 1/2017</b>	<b>Applications received</b>	<b>Supported projects</b>
Promoting low carbon mobility and emission reduction measures	2	0
Opportunities for the transition to a circular economy	10	10
Development of green infrastructure to improve the quality of life	22	9
Eco-innovations	10	4

Source: Green Education Fund, 2019.

The scope of projects can be regional or national. Out of a total of 20 applications received, 16 project plans were supported, which had a regional scope. There were 24 applications with national scope, but only 9 of them were supported. In the first year, most of the funds were distributed between western and central Slovakia. In eastern Slovakia, only one project plan was supported, namely in the district of Rožňava in the Košice Region, but also only one project was unsupported, namely in the district of Levoča in the Prešov Region; more details are described in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Subsidies by region in 2017*

<b>Region</b>	<b>Supported projects</b>		<b>Unsupported projects</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Žilina	3	13.04	5	29.41
Bratislava	10	43.48	2	11.76
Trnava	4	17.39	0	0
Trenčín	1	4.35	0	0
Banská Bystrica	3	13.04	6	35.29
Košice	1	4.35	0	0
Nitra	1	4.35	3	17.65
Prešov	0	0	1	5.88
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Green Education Fund, 2019.

The second year of the Green Education Fund under the designation 2/2018 was published on 15 October on the GEF website. The applications could be sent until 15 January 2019. The applications underwent an administrative check, professional evaluation and the final list was sent to the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, where it was approved. On March 13, 2019, it was published on the GEF website. The individual projects had to be implemented by 30 April 2020 at the latest, but had to submit a final billing by 31 May 2020. In the second year, according to the annual report 2/2018, the financial amount from the first year was added to the financial amount from donors and the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. These were financial resources that 5 applicants did not draw. This brought the total financial amount of the second year of the GEF to the value of 177 156.40 €. In the second year, 41 project plans were supported, of which one did not pass the administrative check. Forty project plans were

submitted for the professional evaluation, of which 28 were selected. Table 4 shows the types of organizations that applied for support from the fund within the year 2/2018.

Table 4

*Type of organization of applicants in 2018*

Type of organization	Applications received	Supported projects
Civic association	36	24
Interest association of legal entities	1	1
Foundation	2	2
Non-profit organization providing public services with an environmental focus	2	1

Source: Green Education Fund, 2020.

The schedule of supported activities was changed in the project support notice 2/2018 compared to the previous call, and applicants could choose from the following categories:

- 1) educational projects for children and youth,
- 2) lifelong learning projects for adults and the professional public,
- 3) educational activities for coordinators of environmental education and other pedagogical staff.

Table 5 shows an updated list of topics that the project intentions were to address.

Table 5

*GEF topics for 2018*

Topics 2/2018	Applications received	Supported projects
Green smart homes and the transition to a circular economy	14	10
Healthy and sustainable buildings	7	5
Preventing and mitigating the adverse effects of climate change	8	5
Improving air quality	0	0
Clean mobility	4	2
Water for sustainable development	8	6

Source: Green Education Fund, 2020.

In the second year, 20 applications with a regional impact were received, of which 14 projects were selected. With a national scope, 21 applications were received, from which 14 project plans were selected and approved. As in the first year, most of the funds were distributed between western and central Slovakia. In eastern Slovakia, three project plans were supported, namely in the district of Košice. On the other hand, there was only one unsupported project in eastern Slovakia, in the district of Prešov. Regional data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6  
*Subsidies by region in 2018*

Region	Supported projects		Unsupported projects	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Žilina	3	10.71	3	25
Bratislava	13	46.43	2	16.67
Trnava	2	7.14	1	8.33
Trenčín	1	3.57	1	8.33
Banská Bystrica	4	14.29	3	25
Košice	3	10.71	0	0
Nitra	2	7.14	1	8.33
Prešov	0	0	1	8.33
Total	28	100	12	100

Source: Green Education Fund, 2020.

A comparison of the first and second years of the GEF, which mainly concerns funding and the number of projects, is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7  
*Comparison of the first and second call of the GEF*

Name of the indicator	GEF 1/2017	GEF 2/2018
Total allocation of funds	155 200.00 €	177 156.40 €
Allocation of funds – GEF donors (private sector)	90 200.00 €	115 200.00 €
Allocation of funds – MoE SR	65 000.00 €	40 000.00 €
Balance of funds from the previous year	-	21 956.40 €
Number of applications for support from the GEF included in the administrative control	44	41
Requested amount of financial support (before administrative control)	294 299.55 €	286 851.30 €
Number of supported projects	23	28
Amount of financial support for finally supported projects	133 243.60 €	170 797.80 €

Source: Green Education Fund, 2019; Green Education Fund, 2020.

As Table 7 shows, the total available allocation of the fund increased in the second year compared to the first, due to a larger volume of funds from the donors and the balance of the first year (5 organizations decided not to use the approved support). There was a slight decrease in the number of applications received at the SAŽP address, but the final number of supported projects, as well as the amount of financial support for projects, increased compared to the first year.

To visualize the number of supported projects within the first two GEF calls in individual districts, a thematic map is created using GIS software, which is shown in Figure 1. According to the results, most projects were supported within five districts belonging to Bratislava, and Galanta district.

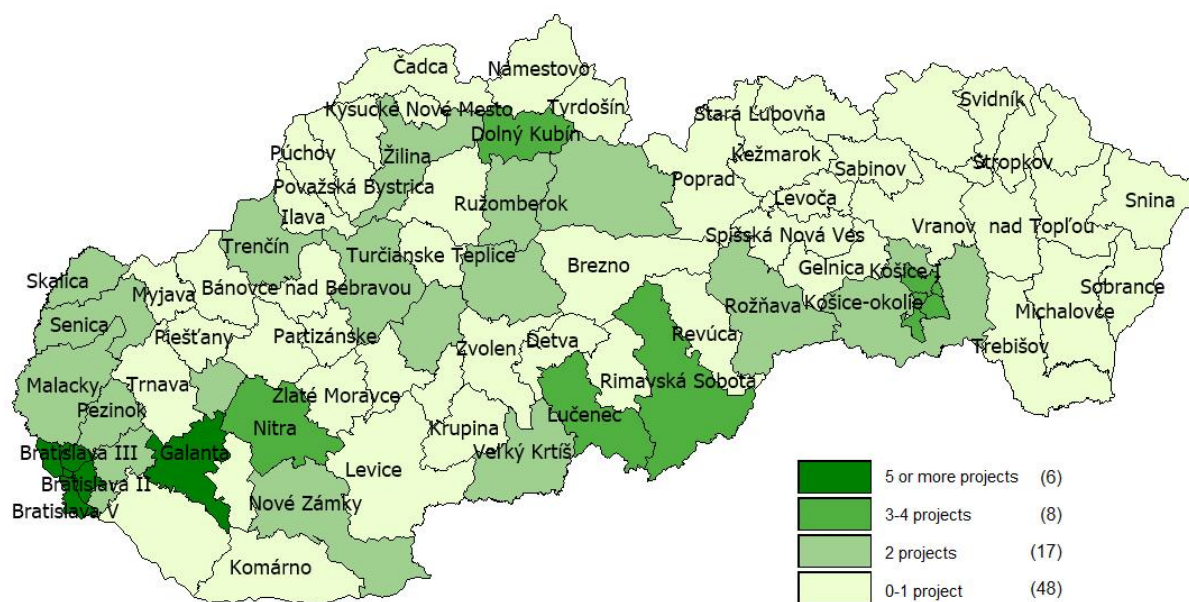


Figure 1. Map of supported projects within the first two calls of GEF.

Source: own processing.

Another thematic map, which is shown in Figure 2, is created to visualize the number of unsupported projects under the first two GEF calls in each district. It indicates that most projects were not supported within the five districts belonging to Bratislava, and the district of Žilina.

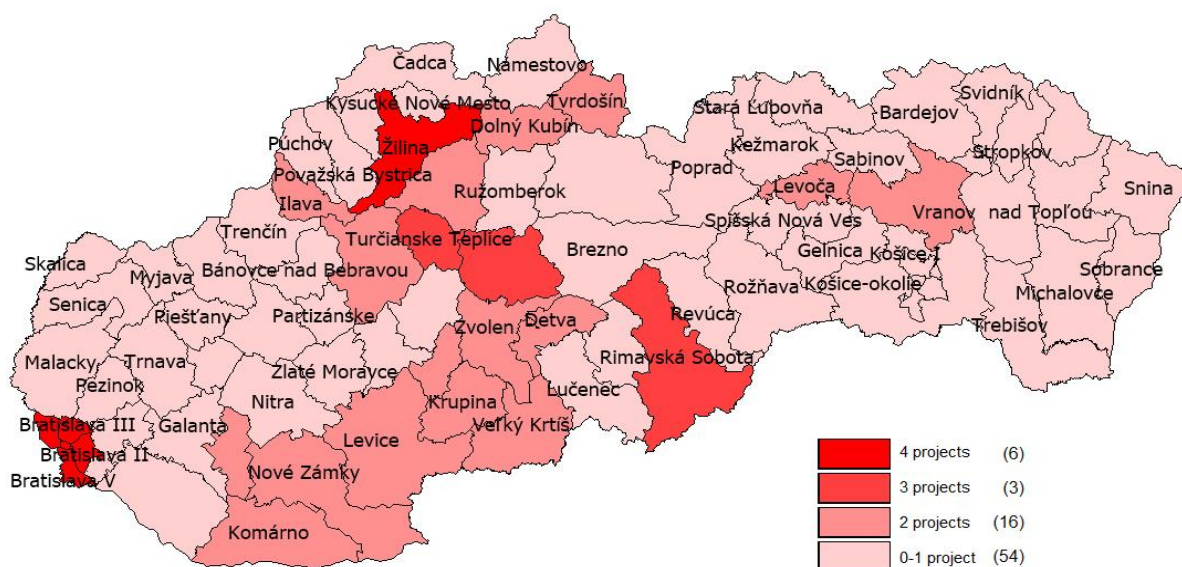


Figure 2. Map of unsupported projects within the first two calls of GEF.

Source: own processing.

Figures 3 and 4 describe the requested amount of granted and ungranted subsidies under the first two calls of the GEF. Within the requested subsidies of supported projects in 2017, the average was 5 793 € and in 2018 it was 6 100 €. Within the requested subsidies of unsupported projects, in 2017 the average was 7 161 € and in 2018 the requested amount reached 6 973 €.

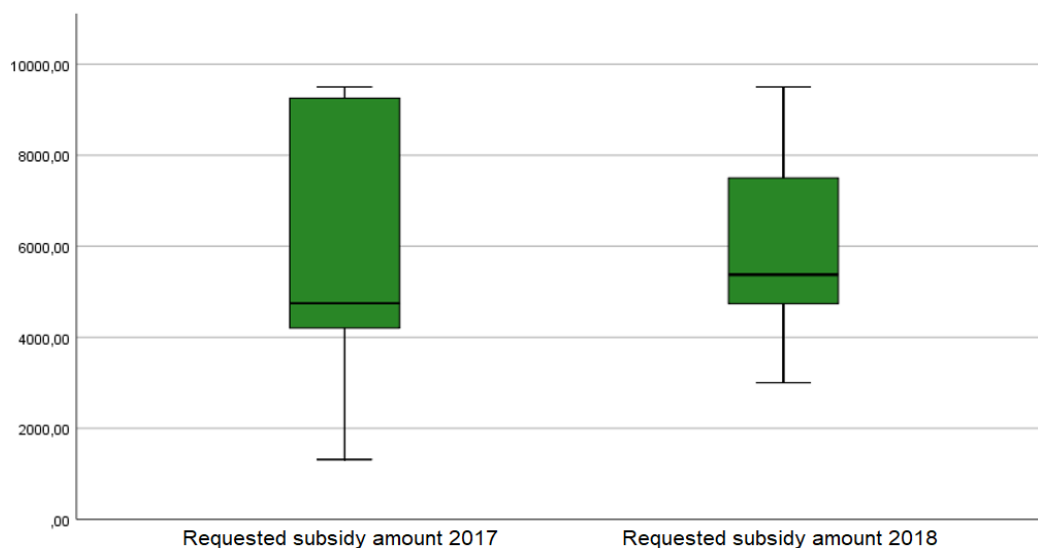


Figure 3. Box plot of the requested amount of subsidies granted under the first two calls of GEF. Source: own processing.

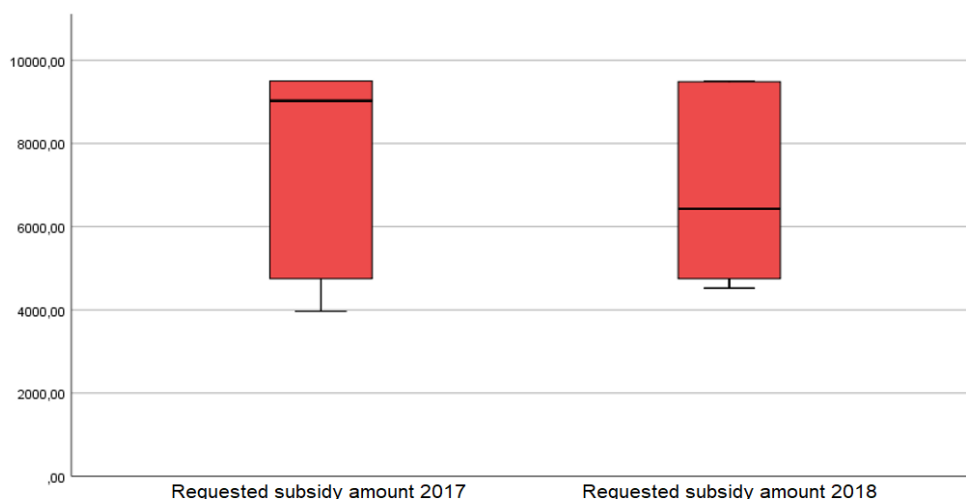


Figure 4. Box plot of the requested amount of unallocated subsidies within the first two calls of GEF. Source: own processing.

## Conclusions

According to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, everyone has the right to education. This opportunity needs to be fully exploited and education needs to be extended to new areas and urgent topics, thus raising people's awareness. Currently, one of the actual areas of education should be environmental education, because environmental protection is a fundamental process that requires urgent changes in human behavior. Environmental education and upbringing should be part of lifelong learning, from pre-school to adult education, and it is therefore necessary to use and develop all possible sources of funding that can help us to improve our relationship with the environment. Current systems for systematic support for the implementation of environmental education and upbringing activities need to be analyzed and evaluated at the same time. The paper focused on the evaluation of the Green Education Fund as the funding opportunity for environmental education in Slovakia. Based on the available data, we focused on the first two years of GEF.



Through the Green Education Fund, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic supported 51 projects in the third sector in the first two years, which would otherwise not be possible to support from European sources, in the amount of more than 300 000 €. Interest in this type of support for non-formal environmental education remains. Therefore, at the beginning of October 2019, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic launched the third year in a row, in which the number of applications for support increased significantly, but the overall allocation of funds is lower than in the previous two years, what may be a problem. As part of the preparations for the next years, it is therefore necessary to re-evaluate the subsidy scheme and set up sustainable financing of the GEF.

However, many of the supported non-formal environmental education projects are successful, raising environmental awareness and building an active approach to the environment, while fulfilling the main purpose – educating a person who can think systematically about the environment and understand phenomena comprehensively and in context.

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