

Community-led forestry project promotes social inclusion and mental well-being in rural Czechia



Stronger



Prosperous



Resilient

SUMMARY

The 'Community Well-being' project, led by the Brdy-Vltava Local Action Group (LAG) and funded through the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach, tackles unemployment and mental health challenges in the Central Bohemia region.

It provides job training to disadvantaged individuals and engages over 1 500 participants in its forest-based activities between 2023 and 2024. The project has set up a new forest education and therapy centre in Malá Hraštica to ensure the long-term sustainability of its initiatives.



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CONTEXT

Located 40 km from Prague, the Brdy-Vltava region comprises 32 municipalities with a population of over 31 000. Despite its proximity to the capital, the area faces significant challenges, including limited job opportunities for disadvantaged groups and declining mental health among children and young adults.

Long-term unemployment is exacerbated by low education levels, social barriers, and lack of qualifications. Meanwhile, mental health issues among younger residents are linked to stress, concentration difficulties, and limited access to supportive leisure activities.

The 'Community Well-being' project addresses these challenges through tailored employment programmes and forest-based activities that foster resilience, social inclusion, and environmental awareness.



OBJECTIVES

- > Restore and improve the working skills and qualifications of disadvantaged individuals through job training and employment in local forestry and gardening sectors;
- > Provide social and psychological support, as well as access to community services;
- > Engage children and young adults in forest-based educational activities focused on climate change adaptation and mental well-being; Encourage young people to spend more time in nature, fostering a deeper understanding of its benefits for physical and mental health;
- > Establish a forest education and therapy centre to support ongoing activities and community needs.

Themes: LEADER/CLLD, education and training, youth, climate, nature and environment, social inclusion, health and care, employment, forestry

Country: Czechia

Organisations:

- > Brdy-Vltava o.p.s Local Action Group (LAG)
- > Municipality of Malá Hraštica, public authority

Start & end date: 01/2023- 12/2025

Budget: EUR 260 416

Funding sources:

- > ESF, 2014-2020 programming period
- > EARD, 2014-2020 programming period
- > Municipalities and local schools in the Brdy-Vltava region

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project began with a **needs analysis rooted in community-based, social service planning**, organised by the Brdy-Vltava LAG in collaboration with various stakeholders, including individuals facing social exclusion. This analysis identified several challenges, with lack of job opportunities emerging as a key concern. Project activities were then prepared around this.

As a next step, the project started to **offer job training programmes for unemployed adults** in the area, including **work placements** in local the forestry and gardening sectors. Participants in the job training programme receive a regular employment contract with the Brdy-Vltava LAG for six months, which can be extended up to one year. During this period, they are trained in using specialised equipment, such as brush cutters and chainsaws, and can acquire a driving licence. After passing exams, participants earn a certificate to validate their new skills.

In addition to technical training, the programme offers **psychological coaching and consultations with a social worker**, helping participants address personal challenges, such as debt management.

Parents participating in job training benefitted from **leisure activities for their children**, including forest-based sessions that combined education and mental health support. Special exercises were introduced to improve concentration and reduce stress, particularly for children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Forest pedagogy activities designed for children and young adults blended theoretical and practical components such as tree planting and climate change education. Collaboration with 21 local schools and kindergartens ensured the integration of climate change topics into educational programmes and the long-term sustainability of forest pedagogy.

A **new outdoor centre** featuring shelters, an educational trail, and spaces for practical training was set up in the municipal forest of Malá Hraštice thanks to the project funding.



RESULTS

By the end of 2024, the project had already:

- > **Supported 17 unemployed adults**, including Ukrainian refugees, with job training programmes; 13 participants completed training and four gained new qualifications.
- > **Partnered with 12 municipalities** to co-fund employment activities, ensuring financial sustainability;
- > **Engaged over 1 500 children and young adults** through 65 educational activities and 24 mental health-focused leisure sessions in forests;
- > **Established long-term partnerships with 21 schools and kindergartens**, integrating climate change education into their curricula;
- > Completed the construction of a **forest education and therapy centre** in Malá Hraštice to support ongoing activities.

Throughout 2025, the project monitors the employment activities of those who completed the training to assess their long-term integration into the labour market.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **Combining employment and education with environmental initiatives** is effective in addressing social and ecological challenges and replicable in rural regions facing similar challenges;
- > **Strong collaboration with municipalities and schools** ensures financial sustainability and community buy-in;
- > The project highlights the value of **close stakeholder collaboration, tailored programmes** to address diverse community needs, and importance of **linking social inclusion with environmental resilience**.



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