

# FOREST KINDERGARTENS AS A GROWING TREND



Outdoor education is a growing, worldwide trend, originating from parent demand for a tailored and child-centered approach to preschool care. In Europe, the first forest kindergarten was initiated in Denmark in the 1950s, following a tradition of outdoor nurseries common in other Scandinavian countries during the past several decades.

Altogether, outdoor preschool education is based on more than a 100 years of tradition and experience. Nowadays, it is estimated that forest kindergartens or similar initiatives exist in around ⅓ of EU member states.

## What is a Forest Kindergarten?



A forest kindergarten is an educational institution where children are encouraged to learn outdoors all year long, in a safe and experience-rich environment, under the guidance of education professionals. Everyday contact with nature has been proven beneficial in children's physical and emotional health, and promotes their future development and learning. A forest kindergarten is a family-friendly place, adapted to local specifics, which also fulfils all goals of the national curriculum.

Children from nature based kindergartens "were more adept at gross motor skills, were able to concentrate better and were less absent due to illness, compared to children who played in a planned, artificial environment." (Grahn et al., 1997)

## The Visegrad Region



In the Visegrad region, the first forest kindergarten was established in the Czech Republic in 2007. Almost 5000 children are estimated currently to be educated in about 235 forest kindergartens or outdoor settings. Unfortunately, in most Visegrad countries, proper legal standards for outdoor preschool education (i.e., outside of a building) are still lacking.

"A forest kindergarten is defined as a preschool institution in which education is carried out mainly outdoors, outside of the facilities of the forest kindergarten; the facilities serve only for occasional stay. The facilities of a forest kindergarten cannot include a building."

Definition of forest kindergartens in the Czech School Act, 561/2004

## Legal and Administrative Solutions Needed



Forest kindergartens have been legally recognized by the Czech School Act since 2016. However, clear legal and administrative standards for this type of education are now needed in all Visegrad countries as parent demand is growing. Solutions to be sought include the regulation of shelters, outdoor catering, hygiene, ensuring teacher's qualifications and education, and most importantly incorporating outdoor education into the overall education system at each national level.

## RECOMMENDED STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY VISEGRAD COUNTRIES



## Who Are We?

We are representatives of forest kindergartens in Visegrad countries (i.e., Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia). Our aim is to make outdoor education in these countries available for children and affordable for their parents.

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