

Breaking gender bias in VET: new European project launches

Nine organisations from six European countries join forces to develop innovative AI-based tools and train teachers to recognise and tackle gender bias in vocational schools.

BGBiVET – Breaking Gender Bias in VET has officially launched, a European project aiming to transform vocational education and training into a more equitable and inclusive environment. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union under Key Action 2, the project brings together nine partners from Ireland, Italy, Bulgaria, Sweden, Finland and Turkey for a three-year journey that will conclude in November 2028.

The kick-off meeting took place on 10 and 11 December 2025 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, at the Professional School of Food Technologies, where representatives from all partner organisations met to define operational strategies and launch the first activities.

Despite the progress made in recent decades, gender stereotypes continue to profoundly influence the educational and career choices of young Europeans. In vocational education and training pathways, this segregation is particularly evident: sectors such as mechanics, IT and construction remain predominantly male, whilst areas such as beauty, fashion and personal services see a clear female majority. These imbalances are not the result of innate differences, but of unconscious biases transmitted through career guidance, teaching materials, family expectations and everyday educational practices.

BGBiVET addresses this challenge with an innovative approach that combines research, technology and training. Over the three years of activity, the consortium will conduct an in-depth analysis of gender equality policies in the educational systems of the partner countries and will develop AI-powered virtual scenarios and tools that enable teachers and students to recognise and address gender bias in simulated settings. This will be complemented by a blended training programme for teachers, focusing on gender-responsive teaching methods, and the creation of replicable gender equality plans adaptable to different school contexts.

The project is coordinated by TUI – Teachers' Union of Ireland, the leading Irish teachers' union with over 23,000 members and extensive experience in promoting equality in the education sector. The technological heart of the project is entrusted to OpenCom, an Italian social enterprise and research centre based in Arezzo, which will lead the development of the AI-based simulation platform. The teacher training programme will be coordinated by the Finnish educational consortium LHKK – Lounais-Hämeen koulutuskuntayhtymä, an organisation that has already successfully implemented its own gender equality plan and serves as a model for the entire partnership.

On the communication and dissemination front, the project draws on the expertise of Euro Education Bulgaria, whilst the Professional School of Food Technologies in Plovdiv, in addition to hosting the inaugural meeting, will actively participate in testing the tools developed. Ireland also contributes through Bridgetown College, a secondary school that will organise the face-to-face training for teachers from all partner countries, a key moment for training in gender-responsive methodologies.

A central role in defining competences and producing educational materials falls to Staffangymnasiet, a Swedish upper secondary school that is part of the prestigious UNESCO-UNEVOC network, which will coordinate the drafting of the teacher's guide for using the simulation platform. Among the Italian partners is the Istituto Cellini in Florence, whose student composition represents an emblematic case of gender segregation in vocational education: Fashion courses are attended almost exclusively by female students, whilst Mechanics courses are attended almost entirely by male students. Completing the consortium is BOSEV, a Turkish foundation committed to social inclusion and the empowerment of marginalised groups, which will coordinate networking activities and organise public events to expand the project's reach.

BGBiVET does not merely study the problem but aims to produce concrete tools that can be adopted by schools and training institutions across Europe. The ultimate goal is to help build a vocational education system in which every student can choose their educational path free from gender-based conditioning.

To follow the project's developments: www.bgbproject.eu

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