

Collaboration is key to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women pursuing careers in the blue economy!

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Ms. Todorka Dimitrova is a director and project management team leader at Varna Economic Development Agency (VEDA) since its established in 1997 in Varna, Bulgaria as a not-for-profit association for operation in public benefit. Additional professional experience includes part-time work as Evaluator, Rapporteur, and Quality Controller for projects, submitted under a variety of EU Calls for proposals.

Ms. Dimitrova's educational background includes:

- Master in Economics from the University of Economics-Varna, Bulgaria
- Professional qualification as a Teacher in Economics from Teachers' Training Institute Dr. Peter Beron-Varna
- English Philology - English philologist and a Teacher in English in secondary education from Shumen University
- Postgraduate specializations in Business Management at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. and the University of Wisconsin (USA) as well as several VET courses for acquiring additional qualifications as a seafarer, an operational account, and others.

Dear Ladies,

Today we would like to introduce you to one inspiring #woman who is an example of quality leadership, successful career and actually shows us what women can do on a high-management position.

Please, get acquainted with this article because it contains valuable information about business opportunities for women in the Blue Sector. Feel free to get in touch with the Agency for more information and check the projects that are presented here in order to expand your professional path knowledge and chances.

Under Ms. Dimitrova's leadership, the @Varna Economic Development Agency (www.veda-bg.eu) has realized more than 70 multinational projects in a variety of economy sectors, aiming to support skills and capacity building of entrepreneurs, start-ups, SMEs managers, and other target groups. The opportunities for creation of new jobs and sustainable growth in the blue economy sectors are in the main focus of VEDA



team because of the natural advantages of Varna City location (The Sea Capital of Bulgaria), based on the Black Sea coast.

The gender equity is continuously taken into consideration in VEDA activities, example of which is:

- The **WINBLUE** Project that VEDA is carrying out, entitled **Empowering Women and Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the Blue Economy** (<https://winblue-project.eu/>). The project is funded by EMFAF and the successful realization in Republic of Bulgaria is achieved due to VEDA's collaboration with **the Sea4Sea Project Team and the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy's leadership**.

The WINBLUE project intends to accelerate the empowerment of women in the blue economy through facilitating their participation in five sectors: **circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology, aquaculture and fisheries, offshore renewable energy, sustainable coastal tourism, cutting edge enabling technology for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems**. The project will launch five WINBLUE labs to involve stakeholders in the co-design and implementation of gender equality plan models; design and validate upskilling and coaching programs for women; implement a data collection and monitoring strategy to benchmark and monitor the evolution of gender inclusiveness in the blue economy; identify and assess highly replicable good practices.

- **The YBE - Young Blue Entrepreneurs Across the World**, also implemented with VEDA participation and funded under the EU Programme Action with Multiple Beneficiaries. The project includes partners and countries from three continents: Africa (Gana and Gambia), South America (St. Lucia and Jamaica) and Europe (Spain, Greece, and Bulgaria). The Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy also cooperate successful for the implementation of project activities in Bulgaria.

Under the YBE project VEDA has initiated and organized two professional training **courses for young unemployed and socially excluded people in Bulgaria, including young girls and women**. The training was aimed at helping them acquire a new profession around the blue economy **as drivers of boats/yachts up to 40 kt**.

The courses were supported by qualified and experienced trainers from the Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy. The Naval Academy also provided very well-equipped facilities for delivery of theoretical and practical training. All trainees have completed successful the training, acquiring professional qualifications as seafarers.

- **The Blue economy digitalization skills for VET students** with an acronym **BlueDivet** (<https://www.bluedivet.eu/>) is another project that VEDA currently works on. The main goal of this project is to develop new training and mentoring programs for VET students under the Erasmus+. The programs will provide both male and female trainees with the knowledge they need to **increase their opportunities to work in the blue economy sectors**. During the training the students will learn about the skills needed to be adapted to an environment like the ocean, the special requirement that the marine and maritime companies have, and what the sustainable blue growth initiative is.

The training Modules include topics related to Blue Economy Sectors (i.e. Marine Energy Digitalization, Fisheries and aquaculture digitalization, Coastal Tourism and recreation, Marine Transportation, Shipping, Ports, Shipyards and Boat Building, Environmental Protection and Marine Observation, Safety and Surveillance, and technologies for blue economy digitalization (i.e. Internet of Things, Digital Security, Artificial Intelligence/ Machine Learning, Big Data, Sensors, Autonomous System/ Robotics, and Digital Twins/AR/VR).

***** The modules' contents in English are ready!** They will be uploaded and tested in the next months at BlueDivet project training platform by the partners. All materials in English, Bulgarian, Greek, and Spanish will be finalized and accessible by interested stakeholders in **May, 2024** at the training platform following the link: <https://bluedivet-training.eu/>

The BlueDivet implementation is supported by the Sea4Sea project team and Naval Academy, to help VEDA reach and involve more students and stakeholders in BlueDivet project's training as well as to boost project dissemination activities.

And last but not least, it is necessary to mention some other VEDA's projects, regarding women and gender equality such as:

- **“Strengthening the Entrepreneurial Spirit and Business Leadership among the Young Women in Varna Region”** – a survey dedicated to identifying of the specific attitude of more than 165 young women in order to start their own business activities, including the sector of Blue Economy.
- **“Methods to empower the Balkan women and their role as active citizens of the European Union”** with a leading organization DIKEAD from Thessalonica, Greece. VEDA representatives took part to discuss gender equality issues in the workshop, conducted in the Bulgarian capital Sofia and in the international conference, held in Thessalonica, Greece.
- **“Women in Business Leadership – New Bulgarian Imperative”**, funded under the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CIDA), dedicated to the organization of three regional networking events for women entrepreneurs, regional conference, and publication of a catalogue of successful women, who run businesses. The networking events include successful women who have shared their model of career path to younger female entrepreneurs.