



Design Smart is an EU funded project aiming to strengthen VET provider's capacity to equip SMEs —especially women entrepreneurs—with essential digital and green skills. Through a VET Curriculum, AI ChatBot, Eco-Fashion Simulator, OERs, mentorship programs, and micro-credentials, SMEs will improve their capacity to integrate AI and circular economy models, fostering long-term competitiveness and policy influence.

Since our first newsletter, Design-Smart has moved from research design into results — and from results into action. This issue shares the headline findings of our Transnational Analysis Report and introduces the training course we've now built on top of them

## From Research to Evidence

Over the past months, partners in Italy, Greece, Spain and Cyprus carried out desk research, questionnaires and focus groups with SMEs, VET providers and industry experts. The findings have now been consolidated into the Design-Smart Transnational Analysis Report — a comparative picture of sustainable fashion, AI-driven eco-design and VET digitalisation across the four countries.

## Key Findings



- All four countries are dominated by micro and small enterprises (90–99.9% of firms). Sustainability awareness is high everywhere, but operational implementation still lags — the gap is capability, not motivation.
- Cost is barrier #1. Across the board, the price of sustainable materials and of digital/AI tools is the most cited obstacle (Spain 80%, Cyprus and Italy ≈70%, Greece 66.7%).
- A shared skills gap. Every country reports a shortage of "hybrid" professionals who combine design, sustainability and digital/AI competences — plus too few trainers able to teach them.
- AI adoption is rising, but uneven. 2025 enterprise AI adoption ranges from Spain's 20.3% to Greece's 8.9%, against an EU27 average of 20.0% — and adoption inside fashion SMEs specifically is lower still.
- Demand for collaboration is strong. Roughly 67–75% of respondents rate new sustainability skills and closer VET–SME collaboration as highly important — yet digital collaboration between VET and industry remains the weakest link in every country, making it the clearest opportunity for Design-Smart.
- The message from every focus group: AI should support craft knowledge, not replace it.

# #2 NEWSLETTER

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## Course Development: **Our Curriculum Is Ready**

Building on the evidence above, we've completed the Design-Smart AI & Sustainable Fashion Curriculum: a 90–115 hour hybrid programme (EQF Level 5) for SME owners, fashion professionals, designers and VET trainers, delivered through case studies, hands-on eco-design projects and industry collaboration.

The curriculum is structured into 3 training categories and 7 modules:

Sustainable Fashion Foundations and Lifecycle Thinking

Digital Tools for Eco-Design: CAD, 3D and Virtual Prototyping

Sustainable Business Strategies and Regulatory Readiness

Sustainable Materials and Responsible Sourcing

Decision-making using Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics in Sustainable Fashion

Marketing, Communication, and Collaboration for Sustainable Innovation

Practical Circular Economy Applications in Fashion

## What's Next

Piloting of the curriculum modules will begin with SMEs and VET providers across the four partner countries, alongside the roll-out of the AI ChatBot and Eco-Fashion Simulator tools. Feedback from the pilots will refine the course ahead of full delivery

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