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Gender Equality Framework Analysis Report

Partner Coordinator
Teachers' Union of Ireland (IE)

August 2026



**Breaking Gender Bias
in Vocational Education and Training
(BGBinVET)**

Gender Equality Framework Analysis Report

August 2026

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About this Report

This report is a deliverable of the project 'Breaking Gender Bias in VET: Through AI-Enhanced Strategies and Gender Equality Plans', funded within the Erasmus+ Programme with applicant Teachers' Union of Ireland and Grant Agreement No. 2025-1-IE01-KA220-VET-000358467.

Recommended Citation

Kenny A. (2026) Gender Equality Framework Analysis Report, BGBinVET Project, Erasmus+ Programme, EU.



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Project contribution to Agenda 2030



Acknowledgment

Thank you to all partners for their support in the development of the survey. In addition, I would like to thank the following colleagues who provided supplementary information on several occasions: Justin Cowlin, Lyubka Slavova, Ercan Küçükarslan, Seamus Lahart, Anne-Marie Toomey, Christina Murphy, Carlo Stella, Sanni Pylkkönen, Erina Guraziu, Raija Salo, Francesca Trasmondi, Klas Tallvid.

Thanks to the Partners for their contributions

- Bridgetown College - BDTC (IE)
- Buyuk Ortadogu Saglik Ve Egitim Vakfi - BOSEV (TR)
- Euro Education Bulgaria - EEB (BG)
- I.I.S. "Benvenuto Cellini" - CELLINI (IT)
- Lounais-Hämeen koulutuskuntayhtymä - LHKK (FI)
- OpenCom i.s.s.c. - OPC (IT)
- Professional School of Food Technology - PSFT (BG)
- Staffan school, Halsingland Education Association - HEA (SE).

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Executive Summary

This report presents an integrated analysis of research undertaken within the Erasmus+ funded Breaking Gender Bias in Vocational Education and Training (BGBinVET) project. The synthesis combines evidence from a survey of N=564 VET students, a survey of N=201 teachers and education staff, and comparative policy reviews conducted across Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Türkiye. Together, these datasets provide a comprehensive picture of the current state of gender equality within European VET systems and the challenges that remain in transitioning policy commitments into everyday practice.

The findings reveal substantial progress in gender equality awareness and policy development. Four out of five students reported understanding the concept of gender bias, while approximately three quarters recognised the interaction between gender, ethnicity, disability and other forms of inequality. Teachers similarly expressed strong support for equality, with almost 80% reporting that their institutions are committed to equality and inclusion. Across all six countries, comprehensive legal and policy frameworks demonstrate a clear strategic commitment to reducing gender inequality in education and employment.

Despite this progress, the research identifies a significant gap between awareness and implementation. While learners and educators generally support gender equality in principle, many struggle to recognise bias in practice. Students reported lower levels of confidence in identifying situations where people are treated differently because of their gender, and substantial uncertainty remains regarding reporting procedures and institutional responses. Teachers frequently acknowledged the influence of stereotypes on confidence, participation and career choices while simultaneously suggesting that discrimination is not a significant issue within their own institutions. This contradiction suggests that gender bias often operates through subtle and unconscious processes rather than overt discrimination.

Occupational segregation emerged as the most consistent finding across all datasets. Policy reviews, teacher responses and student experiences all indicate that vocational and career choices continue to be shaped by traditional gender expectations. Technical and engineering pathways remain disproportionately associated with men, while care and service sectors continue to attract predominantly female participation. This pattern was evident across all six participating countries, regardless of differences in policy maturity or system structure.

Countries differ considerably in their approaches to implementation. Finland represents the most mature system, characterised by mandatory equality planning, institutional accountability and continuous monitoring. Sweden demonstrates a highly developed pedagogical model focused on norm-critical teaching and cultural change. Ireland combines strong governance and policy direction with variable implementation in vocational settings. Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye have developed comprehensive policy frameworks but continue to face challenges relating to teacher capacity, monitoring systems, regional variation, and implementation consistency. The evidence also highlights the importance of teachers, institutional leaders and employers as agents of change. While many examples of inclusive practice were identified, implementation often depends on individual commitment rather than systematic processes. Workplace learning emerged as a particularly important area for future development. Although placements are generally viewed positively, there is limited evidence that employers actively challenge gender stereotypes, suggesting that workplace learning may reinforce rather than disrupt traditional occupational patterns.

Based on the integrated findings, the report proposes the Gender Equality Implementation Framework for Vocational Education and Training (GEIF-VET). The framework is built around five interconnected pillars:

- Awareness
- Practice
- Systems
- Partnerships
- Measurement

Together, these pillars provide a practical roadmap for moving from policy commitment towards measurable institutional and cultural change.

Ultimately, the research suggests that the future challenge for European VET systems is no longer establishing the importance of gender equality. Rather, the challenge lies in ensuring that equality policies, institutional commitments and educational practices work together to reduce occupational segregation, address unconscious bias, strengthen learner confidence, and provide equitable opportunities for all learners irrespective of gender.

1. Introduction

Gender equality has become an established priority within European education policy. Across Europe, governments, educational institutions and international organisations have increasingly recognised that educational systems play a crucial role in shaping life opportunities, labour market participation and social inclusion. Vocational Education and Training (VET) occupies a particularly important position because of its direct relationship with employment pathways and workforce development. Yet despite considerable policy attention, gender segregation remains a persistent characteristic of many VET systems.

The BGBinVET project was established in response to these continuing challenges. The project brings together nine organisations across six countries with the objective of reducing gender bias through a combination of institutional reform, professional development and innovative AI-supported learning resources. The project recognises that gender inequality is not solely a structural problem addressed through policy reform, nor solely a pedagogical issue addressed through classroom practice. Rather, it is produced through the interaction of systems, cultures, institutions and individuals operating across multiple contexts.

Consequently, this report integrates evidence from three complementary project research activities: survey of student experiences, survey of teachers, and policy reviews. Together the datasets provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of gender equality within VET across participating countries.

2. Methodology

This report presents an integrated analysis of evidence collected through the Breaking Gender Bias in Vocational Education and Training (BGBinVET) project. The research adopted a mixed-methods and participatory approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative practitioner insights and policy analysis. The purpose of this approach was to capture multiple perspectives on gender equality within VET and to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement across different educational and national contexts. The analysis draws together three complementary data sources summarized in Table 1 below:

Three project datasets
Student Survey N=564 student responses from VET learners across six partner countries. Survey explored awareness of gender bias, perceptions of fairness, safety, inclusion, workplace learning experiences, and institutional support mechanisms.
Teacher and Education Staff Survey N=201 responses from teachers, trainers, managers, administrators and other education staff. Survey explored classroom practice, organisational culture, leadership, policy implementation, workplace learning, and professional development relating to gender equality.
Country Reports and Policy Reviews Six country reports and six policy reviews covering Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Türkiye. Examined national policy frameworks, institutional practices, implementation approaches, and emerging challenges relating to gender equality within VET systems.

Table 1 BGBinVET project datasets used

The integration of these three datasets facilitated a triangulation approach which provided insights into gender equality from learner, practitioner and policy perspectives. It is argued that this approach strengthened the reliability of the findings by allowing themes to be cross-checked across multiple sources of evidence.

2.1 Participant Profile

The student survey generated N=564 responses. Most respondents were aged between 16 and 20 years (83%), while 51% identified as male and 46% identified as female. The largest study areas represented were Construction and Engineering (26.5%), Health and Social Care (24.7%), and Business and IT (24.5%). Most respondents (80%) were enrolled on full-time programmes. The teacher and education staff survey generated N=201 responses. Most respondents identified as teachers (66%), followed by administrative staff (16%). Most respondents worked on a full-time basis (95%), and 63% were aged over 40 years, providing a mature and experienced practitioner perspective on gender equality within VET settings. In addition, 6 Country Reports and 6 Policy reviews were generated by the project. Table 2 below provides an overview of the project data sets.

Dataset	Participants	Countries	Primary Focus
Student Survey	564	6	Learner experiences and perceptions
Teacher Survey	201	6	Staff perspectives and institutional practices
Country Reports	6	6	National and regional VET contexts
Policy Reviews	6	6	Gender equality policies and implementation

Table 2 Overview of research data set

2.2 Analytical Approach

Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Selected cross-tabulations were used to identify patterns across demographic groups. Qualitative responses from open-ended survey questions, country reports and policy reviews were analysed thematically to identify recurring issues, examples of practice, perceived barriers and recommendations for improvement. The final stage involved an integrated thematic synthesis in which findings from all three datasets were compared and grouped into common themes. Attention was given to areas of convergence and divergence between student experiences, teacher perspectives and policy intentions. This process supported the development of the Gender Equality Implementation Framework for VET (GEIF-VET) presented later in this report. In addition, thematic analysis of data in country reports and policy reviews was utilised to provide deeper contextual insights.

2.3 Research Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into gender equality in VET across six countries, several limitations should be considered. First, the findings are based largely on self-reported survey data from students and staff, which may be influenced by personal perceptions and experiences. Second, educational systems, cultural contexts and policy environments differ across participating countries, meaning that direct comparisons should be interpreted with caution. Third, participation in the surveys was voluntary and therefore may not fully represent all learners, teachers or institutions. The research focuses primarily on perceptions of gender equality rather than long-term outcomes such as progression, employment, or participation rates. In addition, employers were not surveyed directly, meaning that workplace findings are based on student, teacher and policy perspectives. Finally, gender equality

policies and practices continue to evolve, and the findings reflect the context during the period in which the research was conducted.

Despite these limitations, the study strengthens its reliability by combining three complementary evidence sources: student surveys, teacher surveys and cross-country policy reviews. The consistency of findings across these datasets provides a robust foundation for the conclusions, framework and recommendations presented in this report.

3. Student Perspectives on Gender Equality

The student survey provided strong evidence that learners possess a relatively good understanding of gender equality concepts. Four out of five respondents reported understanding what gender bias means, while 75% recognised the relationship between gender and other dimensions of inequality such as disability or ethnicity. These findings suggest that gender equality discourse has become increasingly visible within educational contexts. However, awareness did not necessarily translate into practical recognition of gender bias. The lowest scoring area concerned recognition of situations in which people are treated differently because of their gender. Approximately one third of respondents either disagreed or remained uncertain regarding their ability to recognise differential treatment. This suggests that subtle forms of bias continue to go unnoticed by many learners.

In general students perceived VET learning environments positively. Almost three quarters reported feeling safe and respected, while a similar proportion agreed that VET centres were committed to fairness and equality. Nevertheless, significant minorities remained uncertain regarding reporting procedures, institutional responses and opportunities to raise concerns. Nearly 30% provided neutral responses concerning reporting mechanisms, indicating substantial uncertainty regarding institutional processes.

4. Teachers' Perspectives on Gender Equality

Teacher and education staff responses present a more nuanced picture. While institutional commitment was widely recognised, staff also reported substantial evidence of continuing gender stereotyping. Two thirds of respondents agreed that gender stereotypes influence learner confidence and educational participation. Similarly, approximately two thirds agreed that learners make decisions based upon gendered expectations surrounding occupations and educational pathways. Teachers frequently described examples where technical competence was associated with male learners and organisational capability with female learners. These stereotypes operated subtly rather than overtly. Interestingly, teachers often described tensions between formal equality and practical experiences. Many stated that gender discrimination was no longer a major issue while simultaneously providing examples of unequal expectations, occupational assumptions and differential treatment. This contradiction is a significant finding within the integrated analysis and could highlight the operation of unconscious bias.

The combination of student, teacher and policy perspectives provides a comprehensive evidence base for understanding both the progress and continuing challenges associated with gender equality in VET. While the study has some limitations, the triangulation of multiple data sources strengthens the reliability of the findings and enables the identification of recurring themes, contradictions and opportunities for improvement across different stakeholder groups and national contexts. The following sections present

the key findings from each dataset before drawing together the evidence in an integrated analysis and implementation framework.

5. Comparative Country Policy Analysis

The six country reviews reveal a shared commitment to advancing gender equality in VET, while also shown that countries are operating at different stages of policy maturity and implementation. All countries have established legal and strategic frameworks that support equality, significant variation exists in institutional accountability, teacher preparation, monitoring systems, employer engagement, and the extent to which equality principles have become embedded in everyday educational practice.

A useful way to understand these differences is to view countries along a continuum from policy-driven systems, where implementation remains dependent upon individual institutions, to embedded systems, where equality principles are integrated into teaching practice, organisational culture, learner support systems, and accountability mechanisms. Finland and Sweden represent the most developed examples of the latter approach, while Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye continue to focus on strengthening the mechanisms that convert legislative commitment into practical outcomes. Ireland occupies an intermediate position, characterised by strong governance and policy direction but variable implementation within vocational contexts.

5.1 Bulgaria: Strong Policy Framework, Emerging Implementation

Legislative and Strategic Context

Bulgaria possesses one of the more comprehensive legislative foundations among the participating countries. The Law on Equality between Women and Men (2016) and the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030) establish clear commitments to gender mainstreaming, equal opportunities, and reduction of labour-market segregation. Gender equality is embedded within national education strategies and recognised as a key element of broader social and economic development. Within VET, particular attention is given to increasing female participation in STEM-related pathways, reducing occupational segregation, and encouraging institutions to collect and use gender-disaggregated data to inform decision-making. These objectives align closely with broader European policy priorities concerning inclusion and workforce participation. A summary of the main strengths and challenges is presented in Table 3.

Summary of key strengths and challenges
Strengths One of Bulgaria's key strengths is the existence of a coherent national framework. Unlike many systems where equality initiatives emerge through fragmented projects, Bulgarian policy establishes a clear strategic architecture that enables VET institutions to align their activities with national objectives. The increasing use of dual education models also provides opportunities to influence workplace cultures alongside educational practices. The country report also identifies emerging initiatives focused on: • Gender-sensitive career guidance. • STEM promotion for female learners. • Inclusive teaching methodologies. • Improved institutional procedures regarding harassment and equality-related concerns.

Summary of key strengths and challenges

Challenges

Despite these strengths, Bulgaria illustrates one of the clearest examples of a policy-practice gap. Several challenges persist:

Limited Teacher Capacity

- The policy review highlights a lack of systematic training for teachers in recognising and addressing gender bias. Educators may support equality conceptually but often lack practical tools for challenging stereotypes in classrooms and workshops.

Weak Monitoring

- Although gender-disaggregated data is encouraged, implementation remains inconsistent. As a result, many institutions struggle to identify where inequalities exist or whether interventions are producing measurable outcomes.

Cultural Stereotypes

- Persistent social attitudes continue to influence educational choices. Technical occupations remain strongly associated with male identities, while service-based careers remain predominantly associated with women. These assumptions continue to affect learner aspirations despite policy efforts to challenge them.

Table 3 Bulgaria, summary of the main strengths and challenges

Implications for BGBinVET

Bulgaria demonstrates that robust legislation alone is insufficient to change behaviour. Future interventions should focus on teacher development, practical implementation tools, and institutional accountability frameworks capable of transforming policy aspirations into routine practice.

5.2 Finland: The Benchmark Model

Legislative and Strategic Context

Finland represents the most mature gender equality system among participating countries. Equality is supported through the Equality Act, the Non-Discrimination Act, and extensive national programmes focused on educational inclusion and participation. Importantly, equality planning is mandatory across educational institutions. This requirement fundamentally distinguishes Finland from other systems. Equality is not treated as an optional initiative but rather as an institutional responsibility subject to continuous evaluation and improvement.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges Finland

Strengths include

- Whole-Institution Integration
- Perhaps Finland's most significant strength is its ability to integrate equality into every aspect of institutional life.
- Equality considerations influence:
 - Teaching.
 - Assessment.
 - Learner support.
 - Guidance systems.
 - Institutional planning.
 - Leadership decision-making.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges Finland

• Student Participation

Finnish equality plans are frequently developed collaboratively by staff and students, creating strong ownership and increasing the likelihood that equality initiatives address real learner experiences.

Continuous Monitoring

Unlike systems where equality reviews occur periodically, Finland adopts a continuous improvement approach, using data and evaluation to identify emerging challenges and adapt interventions accordingly.

Challenges

Persistent Segregation

- Occupational segregation remains evident, particularly between technical and care-related pathways. These patterns mirror wider labour-market structures and demonstrate that educational reforms alone cannot fully overcome broader societal influences.

Visibility and Engagement

- The review notes that while equality plans exist, learners are not always fully aware of them. Future efforts may therefore need to focus on making equality mechanisms more visible and understandable to students.

Table 4 Finland Summary of policy strengths and challenges

Implications for BGBinVET

Finnish practice provides a powerful model for Gender Equality Plans, institutional accountability, and continuous evaluation. Many aspects of the BGBinVET framework draw directly from Finnish experience.

5.3 Ireland: Strong Governance, Uneven Implementation

Legislative and Strategic Context

Ireland's approach is characterised by strong strategic leadership. The National Strategy for Women and Girls, HEA Gender Equality Policy, and Athena SWAN Charter collectively provide a highly developed policy architecture supporting equality across education. Unlike many systems, Irish policy increasingly links equality performance to institutional accountability and funding arrangements, creating incentives for institutional action.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Ireland

Strengths

- Data-Driven Policy
- Ireland has invested significantly in monitoring and evaluation. Gender-disaggregated data informs policy development and institutional planning, supporting evidence-based interventions.
- Strategic Leadership
- The policy framework provides clear national direction regarding:
- Career guidance reform.
- STEM participation.
- Equal representation.
- Institutional accountability.
- Role Model Initiatives
- Increasing use of mentoring and role-model approaches seeks to encourage learners to consider non-traditional pathways.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Ireland

Challenges

VET-Specific Implementation

While equality work is relatively advanced within higher education, implementation within vocational settings remains less consistent. Apprenticeships, workplace learning, and employer partnerships often receive less attention within equality frameworks.

Occupational Segregation

Ireland continues to experience strong gender segregation within technical trades and care professions. Educational interventions alone have not fully disrupted these patterns.

Employer Engagement

The research consistently identifies limited employer involvement as a key weakness in the Irish approach.

Table 5 Main strengths and challenges in Ireland

Implications for BGBinVET

Ireland demonstrates the importance of national leadership and accountability mechanisms but also highlights the need to ensure equality policy extends fully into vocational and workplace learning environments.

5.4 Italy: Progress Amid Regional Diversity

Legislative and Strategic Context

Italy's National Strategy for Gender Equality and Code of Equal Opportunities provide a comprehensive legislative foundation for equality work across education and training sectors. These frameworks increasingly position VET as an important mechanism for reducing labour-market inequalities.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Italy

Strengths

- Curriculum Integration
- Italy is increasingly embedding equality considerations within curricula and civic education programmes. The expansion of STEM initiatives targeting female participation represents a particularly important development.
- Institutional Innovation
- Numerous local projects demonstrate innovative approaches involving:
 - Role models.
 - Gender-sensitive guidance.
 - Inclusive classroom practices.
 - Workshop role rotation.

Challenges

Regional Variation

Italy experiences some of the largest disparities between regions. Northern regions often demonstrate strong employer engagement and more developed VET provision, while other regions face resource and implementation challenges.

Monitoring Systems

Schools and training providers frequently lack robust monitoring frameworks capable of evaluating gender equality outcomes systematically.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Italy

Cultural Norms

Occupational stereotypes remain deeply embedded and continue to shape programme selection.

Table 6 Main strengths and challenges in Italy

Implications for BGBinVET

The Italian experience highlights the need to accompany policy development with monitoring systems and implementation support capable of ensuring consistent practice across institutions.

5.5 Sweden: Culture Change Through Pedagogy

Legislative and Strategic Context

Sweden adopts perhaps the most distinctive approach among participating countries. While legal protections exist, Swedish equality policy focuses heavily on pedagogical transformation through norm-critical approaches.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Sweden

Strengths

- Norm-Critical Pedagogy
- Rather than solely addressing outcomes, Swedish approaches seek to challenge the social norms that produce inequality.
- Teachers are encouraged to:
 - Question stereotypes.
 - Promote critical reflection.
 - Encourage diverse career aspirations.
 - Challenge assumptions about gender and ability.
- Cultural Transformation
- Sweden views equality as a cultural challenge rather than simply a policy issue, creating strong alignment between educational practice and social inclusion goals.

Challenges

Teacher Dependence

The success of Swedish approaches often depends on teacher awareness and commitment. Consequently, implementation quality can vary considerably between institutions.

Limited Formal Accountability

Compared with Finland, Sweden relies less on mandatory monitoring and more on professional practice, creating potential inconsistencies.

Table 7 Main strengths and challenges in Sweden

Implications for BGBinVET

Sweden demonstrates the importance of pedagogical practice and cultural transformation. The project's AI-supported simulations align strongly with these principles, particularly in promoting reflective learning.

5.6 Türkiye: Rapid Development and Reform

Legislative and Strategic Context

Türkiye has experienced substantial development in gender equality policy over recent years through the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment Strategy, ETCEP initiatives and Ministry of National Education reforms.

Summary of the main strengths and challenges in Türkiye
Strengths
• Practical Orientation • Turkish approaches frequently focus on practical interventions including: • Mentoring programmes. • Role model initiatives. • Awareness activities. • Mixed-gender learning environments. • Career guidance reforms. • Reform Momentum • Among participating countries, Türkiye demonstrates some of the strongest momentum for educational modernisation, digitalisation and inclusion initiatives.
Challenges
Regional Disparities
Implementation varies significantly between regions and institutions, affecting consistency and access.
Cultural Expectations
Traditional gender norms continue to influence educational pathways and occupational aspirations.
Monitoring and Evaluation
While monitoring systems are expanding, greater standardisation is required to ensure meaningful accountability.

Table 8 Main strengths and challenges in Türkiye

Implications for BGBinVET

Türkiye demonstrates how ambitious reform programmes can create substantial progress, but also illustrates the importance of implementation consistency, teacher development, and system-wide evaluation.

5.7 Comparative Synthesis

The country analyses revealed three broad models of gender equality implementation, ranging from embedded, accountability and development systems, see Table 9 for summary of key features:

Embedded Systems	Accountability-Based Systems	Developmental Systems
Finland Sweden Characteristics: • Strong cultural integration. • Teacher ownership. • Systematic implementation. • Continuous improvement.	Ireland Characteristics: • Strong governance. • Strategic leadership. • Data-driven monitoring. • Variable implementation.	Bulgaria Italy Türkiye Characteristics: • Strong policy intent. • Growing implementation. • Capacity-building needs. • Regional variability.

Table 9 Summary of equality implementation systems

Collectively, the evidence suggests that the most successful systems combine legislation, institutional accountability, teacher development, learner participation, and continuous monitoring. Countries that focus exclusively on policy frameworks without embedding equality into everyday practice experience the greatest implementation challenges.

Table 10 provides a comparative analysis of gender equality policy strengths and challenges in VET across partner countries and implications for BGBinVET project. Providing a synthesis the main findings from the country reports, policy reviews, student survey and teacher survey.

Country	Policy Strengths	VET Strengths	Key Gender Equality Challenges	Implications for BGBinVET
Finland	Strong legal framework; mandatory Equality Plans; integrated monitoring and accountability systems.	Highly flexible learner pathways; strong student support systems; close alignment between policy and institutional practice.	Persistent occupational segregation in technical and care sectors; equality plans not always visible to learners.	Provides a benchmark model for institutional Gender Equality Plans, monitoring systems and evidence-based implementation.
Sweden	Strong legislative foundation combined with norm-critical pedagogical approaches	Equality embedded in school culture; strong focus on reflective and inclusive teaching practices.	Variability in implementation between institutions; limited formal accountability systems; continued labour-market segregation.	Demonstrates the importance of cultural change and teacher-led interventions in reducing bias
Ireland	Strong national strategy; Athena SWAN framework; data-driven policy and accountability systems.	Strong progression routes; diverse provision; growing focus on inclusion and widening participation.	Inconsistent implementation within VET; apprenticeship gender imbalance; limited employer engagement.	Highlights the need to strengthen VET-specific implementation and workplace learning equality.
Bulgaria	Clear legislative framework and national gender equality strategy aligned with EU priorities.	Strong dual education model; growing employer engagement; increasing focus on STEM participation.	Weak institutional implementation; limited teacher training; inconsistent use of gender data; strong occupational stereotypes.	Illustrates the challenge of translating policy commitment into classroom and institutional practice.
Italy	Strong policy direction through National Gender Equality Strategy and Equal Opportunities legislation.	Diverse vocational sectors; increasing integration of equality into curriculum and guidance.	Significant regional inequalities; limited monitoring systems; persistent cultural stereotypes; variable employer engagement.	Demonstrates the importance of implementation monitoring and regional consistency.
Türkiye	Strong national reform agenda; emphasis on inclusion, participation and equal access.	Expanding apprenticeship systems; strong focus on digitalisation, AI and innovation.	Regional disparities; cultural gender norms; uneven implementation; limited monitoring consistency.	Provides examples of practical interventions, mentoring and awareness initiatives that can support implementation.

Table 10 Comparison across VET policy and implementation

Ratings were assigned through qualitative comparative analysis of national policy reviews, institutional governance arrangements, monitoring systems, implementation mechanisms and stakeholder interviews. Ratings should be interpreted as indicative rather than absolute measures of system maturity.

Dimension	Finland	Sweden	Ireland	Bulgaria	Italy	Türkiye
Legislative Framework	Very High	High	Very High	High	High	High
Institutional Accountability	Very High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Teacher Development	High	Very High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Equality Monitoring	Very High	Moderate	High	Low	Moderate	Moderate
Employer Engagement	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Equality Culture	High	Very High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Overall System Maturity	Very High	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate-High

Table 11 Relative maturity of gender equality systems in VET

The comparative analysis demonstrates that all six countries have established a strong policy commitment to gender equality, but they differ considerably in their ability to translate policy into meaningful institutional practice. Finland emerges as the most mature system because equality planning, monitoring, accountability and student participation are formally embedded within educational structures. Sweden similarly demonstrates a highly advanced approach, although its emphasis is less on compliance and more on cultural transformation through norm-critical pedagogy and reflective teaching practice.

Ireland occupies an intermediate position, combining sophisticated national policy frameworks with emerging implementation mechanisms. While equality is increasingly supported through data-driven governance and institutional accountability, gaps remain within vocational pathways, particularly apprenticeships and employer engagement. Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye all demonstrate strong policy intent but continue to face challenges in implementation consistency, educator preparedness and monitoring capability. Regional variation is particularly significant in Italy and Türkiye, while Bulgaria continues to experience difficulties in institutional ownership and teacher capacity. Across all countries, three common challenges emerge. First, occupational segregation remains deeply embedded, with learners continuing to associate technical pathways with men and care-oriented occupations with women. Second, many teachers remain under-prepared to identify and challenge unconscious bias in classroom and workshop settings. Third, workplace learning environments are often characterised by passive equality, where overt discrimination is rare, but stereotypes are seldom actively challenged.

The analysis suggests that future progress depends not on creating additional policy frameworks but on strengthening implementation mechanisms. Specifically, successful systems combine five critical elements: strong governance, teacher professional development, learner participation, employer engagement and continuous monitoring. Where these elements align, gender equality becomes embedded in educational culture rather than remaining a policy aspiration.

This comparative evidence provides a strong rationale for the proposed BGBinVET Gender Equality Implementation Framework (GEIF-VET), which seeks to integrate policy, practice, institutional systems, partnerships and measurement into a coherent model for reducing gender bias across European VET systems

6. Integrated Data Discussion

6.1 Learning from the Data

The integrated analysis of student survey findings, teacher survey findings, and the six country policy reviews provide a unique opportunity to examine gender equality in VET from multiple perspectives. While each dataset independently suggests generally positive attitudes towards equality, the combined evidence reveals a more complex picture characterised by an apparent disconnect between policy agenda, institutional practices, and lived experience. Across all three data sources, the most consistent finding is not the existence of overt discrimination, but rather the persistence of subtle, normalised, and often unrecognised forms of gender bias that continue to shape educational experiences and occupational choices.

Five interconnected themes can be identified from analysis of the datasets:

- The awareness-practice gap.
- Hidden and unconscious bias.
- Occupational segregation and pathway selection.
- Institutional culture and reporting systems.
- The role of teachers, leaders and employers as agents of change.

6.2 The Awareness-Practice Gap

Perhaps the most striking finding across the project is the difference between conceptual awareness of gender equality and the ability to recognise bias in practice. Student respondents generally demonstrated strong awareness of gender equality concepts. Eighty percent agreed or strongly agreed that they understood what gender bias means, while 75% reported awareness that gender bias can intersect with factors such as disability, ethnicity, and social background. These findings suggest that equality terminology and concepts have become increasingly visible within educational environments. However, this awareness appears significantly weaker when learners are required to identify bias in real-world situations. The statement “I notice when people are treated differently because of their gender” generated one of the lowest average scores within the survey (3.49/5). Thirty-five percent of respondents either disagreed, strongly disagreed, or remained uncertain regarding their ability to identify differential treatment.

A similar pattern emerged among staff. Although 66.5% agreed that stereotypes influence learner confidence, 61% agreed learners make educational choices based on gender expectations and 77.7% reported confidence in challenging gender-biased comments, many respondents simultaneously claimed that bias was no longer a significant issue within their institutions. This contradiction is evident in several qualitative responses.

One respondent wrote:

“Gender does not matter; there are only people and everyone can do anything.” Another respondent described situations where:

“A female learner in an engineering-related course was not taken as seriously by some classmates, even though her performance was strong.”

This pattern suggests that many respondents recognise gender bias as an abstract concept while having difficulty identifying how it operates in everyday educational environments.

The findings strongly support international research on unconscious bias which argues that many forms of inequality continue not because of explicit discrimination but because stereotypical assumptions become normalised and therefore invisible to those who reproduce them. The challenge for VET institutions is therefore not simply raising awareness but helping teachers, learners and employers recognise how bias manifests within routine interactions and decision-making processes.

6.3 Hidden and Unconscious Bias

The teacher survey provides considerable evidence that contemporary gender bias in VET is often subtle, indirect, and may be embedded within daily practices. While relatively few respondents reported overt discrimination, many described situations involving implicit assumptions about capability, suitability, participation and leadership.

One respondent noted:

“There are subtle, unconscious expectations related to the choice of academic subjects or extracurricular activities.”

Another explained:

“Boys are more often expected to do better with technical or mathematical tasks, while girls are more likely to do better with communicative or organisational activities.”

These findings are particularly important because they align closely with learner responses. Students generally reported fair treatment within VET settings:

- 63% believed learners of all genders are treated fairly.
- 70% agreed that all learners receive the same opportunities for tasks and roles.
- 75% felt safe and respected within their learning environment.

At first glance these findings suggest limited inequality. However, closer examination reveals significant uncertainty. For example:

- 25% of learners provided neutral responses regarding fair treatment.
- 23% gave neutral responses concerning gender representation in learning materials.
- 28% gave neutral responses regarding reporting procedures.

One-third had no clear opinion regarding whether teachers challenge stereotypes. High levels of neutrality can indicate uncertainty, lack of visibility, or limited engagement rather than explicit support for equality initiatives. The prevalence of neutral responses is therefore noteworthy because it may indicate that many learners are unable to judge whether equality practices operate effectively. This interpretation is reinforced by teacher comments suggesting that subtle gender expectations continue to influence behaviour. Examples included:

- Assigning physically demanding tasks to male students.
- Expecting female learners to take organisational roles.
- Presenting technical occupations through predominantly male examples.
- Assuming different career aspirations based upon gender.

Taken together, the data suggest that gender bias within contemporary VET is less likely to appear as overt exclusion and more likely to emerge through seemingly routine decisions that may accumulate over time.

6.4 Occupational Segregation and Educational Choices

One of the most consistent findings across all datasets concerns occupational segregation. Every national policy review identifies gendered participation patterns as a major challenge. Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye all report continued concentration of women in health, care and service-oriented sectors and men in technical, construction-related and engineering occupations. The teacher survey data supports these observations strongly.

- Sixty-one percent agreed that learners continue to make educational choices based upon gender expectations.

Qualitative responses frequently described how:

“Some technical majors are viewed as male and others female.” Another respondent explained:

“Career guidance resources promote equality only partially because gender stereotyped recommendations are still observed.”

The persistence of segregation appears particularly significant because students themselves generally perceive their environments as fair and inclusive. This suggests that unequal participation is not necessarily driven by institutional exclusion. Instead, the evidence indicates that occupational segregation is reinforced through:

- Family expectations.
- Social norms.
- Career guidance processes.
- Peer influences.
- Workplace cultures.

Sweden's policy review captures this issue effectively by arguing that education systems continue to reflect the gender structure of labour markets. Similarly, Finland identifies persistent segregation despite extensive equality planning and accountability measures. Consequently, increasing participation in non-traditional sectors requires more than equal access policies. It requires active interventions that challenge assumptions regarding who belongs in different occupations.

6.5 Institutional Culture, Safety and Reporting Systems

Across all datasets, institutional culture emerges as a significant strength of participating VET organisations. Students report positive experiences regarding:

- Safety.
- Respect.
- Fairness.
- Institutional commitment to equality. Specifically:
- 75% reported feeling safe and respected.

- 74% agreed their VET centre is committed to gender fairness.
- 71% agreed staff take gender equality seriously. Teacher responses reinforce this picture.
- Almost 80% agreed that their institutions are committed to equality, while more than 88% reported that staff and learners generally feel safe within the workplace. Nevertheless, reporting systems emerged as a significant area of concern.
- Only 57% of students agreed that their institution clearly explained how to report gender-related concerns, while 28% selected neutral responses.

Teachers expressed similar reservations.

Although almost 60% agreed that reporting systems exist, more than one-third remained uncertain regarding their effectiveness. Qualitative feedback further emphasised this issue.

One respondent observed:

“Reporting procedures exist but are not always well known or used.”

Another stated:

“Students do not know where and how to report.”

These findings suggest that institutions have generally succeeded in establishing policies and procedures but have been less successful in ensuring visibility, accessibility, and confidence among users. The challenge therefore concerns not only creating systems but also ensuring that learners and staff understand and trust them.

6.6 Teachers, Leaders and Employers as Change Agents

Across all datasets, teachers emerge as perhaps the single most influential actors in reducing gender bias. The policy reviews repeatedly highlight the importance of:

- Inclusive pedagogy.
- Gender-sensitive career guidance.
- Norm-critical teaching.
- Reflective practice.

Survey findings support this emphasis. Seventy-seven percent of teachers reported confidence in addressing gender-biased comments, while 64% agreed staff challenge stereotypes when they occur. However, the number of neutral responses suggests considerable variation between educators and institutions. This indicates that the effectiveness of equality initiatives often depends on individual awareness rather than systemic practice. Leadership also plays an important role. Yet even where leadership is perceived positively, structural inequalities remain. Only 7% believed leadership reflected gender balance. Qualitative responses nevertheless described male dominance in senior positions and technical departments. In addition, work-placement employers represent a critical but underdeveloped area of intervention. Students generally viewed workplace placements positively: 66% agreed supervisors treated learners equally. Most reported safe and respectful experiences. Teachers similarly reported: 81.5% agreement that placements are safe. 77.9% agreement that workplace supervisors treat learners equally. However, employer willingness to challenge stereotypes was much weaker. Almost half of teacher respondents selected neutral responses regarding whether employers actively challenge gender stereotypes. This finding is significant because workplace learning represents the final stage in

the learner pathway before employment. If stereotypes remain unchallenged during placements, educational interventions may be insufficient to disrupt occupational segregation.

6.7 Summary of Key Discussion Themes

A summary of key themes from the different datasets is presented in Table 12. This maps out some key items relating to seven equality themes.

Theme	Student Survey Evidence	Teacher Survey Evidence	Policy Review Evidence
Awareness of Gender Equality	80% understand gender bias; 75% recognise intersectionality	Staff demonstrate strong awareness of stereotypes and inequality	Strong policy commitment across all countries
Recognition of Bias	Lowest survey score (3.49/5) related to recognising differential treatment	Frequent examples of unconscious and implicit bias reported	Teacher awareness and bias recognition identified as priority areas
Occupational Segregation	Learners continue to select traditional pathways	61% agree learners make choices based on gender expectations	Identified as a major challenge in all six countries
Institutional Commitment	74% agree VET centres are committed to fairness	80% report institutional commitment to equality	Strong national frameworks and strategic plans evident
Safety and Respect	75% feel safe and respected in VET settings	88% agree staff and learners generally feel safe	Safe and inclusive environments prioritised across policies
Reporting Systems	Only 57% understand reporting procedures; 28% neutral responses	Significant uncertainty regarding effectiveness of procedures	Monitoring and accountability remain underdeveloped in several countries
Inclusive Teaching Practice	One-third uncertain whether teachers challenge stereotypes	64% agree staff challenge stereotypes when they occur	Professional development identified as a critical implementation factor
Employer Engagement	Generally positive workplace experiences	49% neutral regarding whether employers challenge stereotypes	Employer engagement identified as a weak but important area for development

Table 12 Summary of key equality theme by dataset

Overall, the integrated discussion indicates that VET systems have been relatively successful in building awareness and establishing supportive policy frameworks. However, the next phase of development must focus on recognising and addressing hidden forms of bias, strengthening reporting systems, supporting teachers as equality practitioners, and ensuring employers become active partners in challenging occupational stereotypes. These findings provide the foundation for the BGBinVET Gender Equality Implementation Framework presented in the following section.

6.8 Critical Analysis of the Findings

While the overall findings present a positive narrative of increasing awareness, strong institutional commitment, and comprehensive policy frameworks, a more critical examination reveals several tensions and contradictions that require careful consideration. The evidence suggests that VET systems across the partner countries may be entering what could be termed a “post-awareness phase” of gender equality, where broad acceptance of equality principles exists, but substantial challenges remain in translating these principles into measurable behavioural and structural change.

6.8.1 The Equality Paradox: High Commitment, Limited Transformation

One of the most significant contradictions emerging from the data is what might be described as the equality paradox. Across student and teacher surveys, respondents consistently report positive attitudes towards equality:

- 74% of students believe their VET centre is committed to fairness for all genders.
- Nearly 80% of staff believe their institution is committed to equality.
- Most respondents report safe, respectful learning and working environments.

On the surface, these findings suggest considerable progress. However, the same datasets simultaneously reveal:

- Continuing occupational segregation.
- Persistent gender stereotypes.
- Uncertainty regarding reporting systems.
- Evidence of unequal confidence and participation.
- Ongoing assumptions regarding gender-appropriate careers.

This contradiction raises an important question: If equality is perceived as largely achieved, why do gendered outcomes remain so persistent? A possible explanation is that contemporary forms of gender inequality are increasingly subtle. Unlike earlier forms of discrimination, which may have involved overt exclusion or unequal access, current inequalities frequently emerge through expectations, assumptions, social norms and everyday interactions. Consequently, participants may genuinely perceive their environments as fair while simultaneously reproducing practices that reinforce inequality. The implication is that traditional equality measures focusing on awareness alone may have reached their limits. Future interventions must therefore focus on developing critical reflection, behaviour change, and organisational learning rather than simply increasing knowledge of equality concepts.

6.8.2 Limitations of Self-Reported Equality Perceptions

The findings also highlight a broader methodological challenge associated with self-reported data. Students generally reported positive perceptions regarding fairness, equal opportunities and inclusion. Teachers similarly expressed confidence in institutional commitment and their own ability to challenge bias. However, self-reported perceptions do not necessarily indicate the absence of inequality, several survey findings suggest the opposite:

- Students demonstrated much stronger awareness of equality concepts than recognition of bias in practice.
- Teachers acknowledged the influence of stereotypes while often asserting that discrimination was not present.
- High levels of neutral responses suggest uncertainty or limited visibility rather than clear evidence of equality.

This raises the possibility that some respondents may overestimate the effectiveness of equality initiatives due to:

- Social desirability bias.
- Institutional loyalty.
- Lack of exposure to alternative experiences.

- Limited understanding of unconscious discrimination.

From a research perspective, this suggests that equality should not be evaluated solely through perceptions. Future project stages should incorporate behavioural and outcome-based measures such as:

- Programme participation patterns.
- Leadership representation.
- Completion rates.
- Employment outcomes.
- Reports of incidents and responses.

6.8.3 Occupational Segregation as Evidence of Structural Failure

Perhaps the strongest evidence that gender inequality remains embedded within VET systems is the continued existence of occupational segregation. All six policy reviews identify segregation as a major concern despite years of policy intervention. Finland and Sweden, despite possessing some of the most advanced equality systems in Europe, continue to report significant gender concentration within specific vocational sectors. Ireland, Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye similarly identify ongoing underrepresentation of women in technical disciplines and men in care-related programmes. This persistence raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of existing interventions. Although policy frameworks increasingly promote equal access, equal access alone appears insufficient to generate equal participation. The evidence suggests that:

- Learners continue to internalise gendered occupational norms.
- Career guidance remains inconsistent.
- Labour market structures reinforce educational patterns.
- Employers often reproduce rather than challenge occupational stereotypes. Consequently, occupational segregation should not simply be viewed as an educational issue. Rather, it reflects the interaction between:
 - Educational systems.
 - Labour market structures.
 - Family expectations.
 - Cultural norms.
 - Media representations.

This implies that successful interventions must operate across all these domains rather than focusing exclusively on educational settings.

6.8.4 The Hidden Curriculum of Gender

The qualitative findings point towards the existence of a "hidden curriculum" within VET environments. The hidden curriculum refers to the informal messages, expectations and values communicated through everyday interactions rather than formal teaching. Examples identified in the project include:

- Male learners being assigned physically demanding tasks.
- Female learners undertaking organisational roles.
- Technical competence being associated with masculinity.

- Communication skills being linked to femininity.
- Importantly, these practices are rarely intentional.

Many participants who described such examples did not interpret them as discriminatory. This finding is significant because it indicates that gender inequalities may persist even in institutions genuinely committed to equality. As a result, future professional development should move beyond policy awareness and focus specifically on:

- Reflective practice.
- Implicit bias.
- Classroom observations.
- Critical incident analysis.
- Peer review processes.

Without attention to the hidden curriculum, formal equality initiatives risk addressing symptoms rather than underlying causes.

6.8.5 Reporting Systems: Symbolic or Functional

A further area requiring critical examination concerns reporting procedures. Students and staff consistently identified uncertainty regarding reporting processes: 28% of students were neutral regarding reporting mechanisms. More than one-third of teachers expressed uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of reporting procedures. From a critical perspective, these findings suggest that reporting systems may currently function more as symbolic structures than as operational mechanisms. Many institutions appear able to demonstrate the existence of policies and procedures. However, the research raises questions regarding:

- Visibility.
- Accessibility.
- User confidence.
- Perceived confidentiality.
- Follow-up actions.

Consequently, future evaluation should focus not simply on the existence of reporting systems but on whether learners and staff:

- Understand them.
- Use them.
- Trust them.

And by action, the experience of meaningful outcomes when concerns are raised.

6.8.6 The Missing Stakeholder: Employers

The project consistently highlights employers as both crucial and underdeveloped partners in gender equality work. Work placements represent one of the most influential experiences for VET learners because they connect educational pathways with workplace cultures. Yet employer engagement emerges as one of the weakest dimensions across all datasets. While placement environments were generally viewed positively. Nearly half of teachers remained neutral regarding whether employers

actively challenge stereotypes. Few examples were provided of employers promoting gender equality proactively. Most evidence suggested passive rather than active inclusion. This is particularly problematic because workplaces are often where occupational stereotypes become most visible. Consequently, VET equality initiatives risk being undermined unless employers are fully integrated into intervention strategies. Future project development should therefore position employers as co-creators rather than recipients of equality initiatives.

6.8.7 Considerations

From a critical perspective, the findings suggest that European VET systems have largely succeeded in establishing awareness, policy frameworks and organisational commitment to gender equality. However, progress in these areas has not yet translated into equivalent reductions in occupational segregation, unconscious bias or gendered participation patterns. The evidence demonstrates that future challenges are increasingly cultural rather than legislative. The key issue is no longer whether institutions support gender equality. Rather, the challenge concerns whether systems can move beyond symbolic commitment towards transformative practice. Achieving this transition requires:

- Greater attention to unconscious bias.
- Stronger focus on behavioural change.
- More rigorous monitoring of outcomes.
- Deeper engagement with employers.
- Institutional cultures that promote critical reflection rather than compliance alone.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the next stage of gender equality development in VET will be determined not by the creation of new policies but by the quality of implementation, accountability and organisational learning that follows.

6.8.8 Structural and Societal Constraints

While educational institutions play an important role in promoting gender equality, the findings suggest that many of the patterns observed within VET are shaped by wider structural and societal influences that extend beyond the direct control of schools, training centres, and teachers. Occupational segregation, identified consistently across the student survey, teacher survey and country policy reviews, reflects not only educational choices but also broader labour market structures, economic incentives, family expectations, cultural norms, and media representations. Across all six countries, sectors such as engineering, construction and manufacturing remain predominantly associated with men, while health, care and service occupations continue to attract higher levels of female participation. These patterns mirror labour market structures that learners encounter throughout their lives and are reinforced through socialisation processes that begin long before entry into VET.

Economic considerations also influence participation patterns. Labour market opportunities, wage expectations, employment security and perceptions of career progression can encourage learners towards occupations traditionally associated with their gender. Family influence remains significant, with teachers reporting that learners often arrive at VET with well-established assumptions regarding suitable careers and educational pathways. Similarly, several country reviews identify cultural expectations as an ongoing barrier to achieving balanced participation across vocational sectors. These influences are further reinforced through media representations that frequently portray certain occupations and leadership roles through gendered lenses, contributing to the normalisation of occupational stereotypes. Consequently, educational interventions alone are unlikely to eliminate gender bias or occupational segregation entirely. Sustainable progress requires coordinated action across education systems,

employers, policymakers, families, industry bodies and wider society to challenge traditional assumptions, promote diverse role models and create environments in which career choices are determined by individual interests, talents and aspirations rather than prevailing gender expectations

6.9 Synthesising Student, Teacher and Policy Perspectives

This chapter brought together relevant elements from the three datasets, the below table provides a summary of key themes that emerged.

Theme	Students	Teachers	Policy
Awareness	High understanding	Strong awareness	Strong policy support
Recognition of Bias	Lower practical recognition	Mixed recognition	Priority area
Occupational Segregation	Visible in pathways	Strongly recognised	Major policy focus
Reporting Systems	Uncertainty	Limited confidence	Weak visibility
Work Placements	Mostly positive	Passive employer role	Underdeveloped area

Table 13 Summary of key elements for the datasets

7. Gender Equality Implementation Framework

7.1 Towards a Framework

The Gender Equality Implementation Framework for Vocational Education and Training (GEIF-VET) is informed by a synthesis of established theories relating to gender equality, educational change, organisational development and inclusive practice. Rather than viewing gender bias solely as an individual behaviour or policy issue, the framework recognises that gender equality is shaped through the interaction of learners, educators, institutions, workplaces and wider social systems. The framework draws on Gender Mainstreaming Theory (European Commission, 2020), which emphasises the systematic integration of gender considerations into policy, planning, implementation and evaluation processes. It also reflects Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which recognises that learner experiences are influenced by multiple interconnected environments, including classrooms, institutions, families, workplaces and broader societal norms. The framework is further informed by Organisational Change Theory (Fullan, 2007; Kotter, 1996), which highlights the importance of leadership, culture, systems and accountability in achieving sustainable change. Wenger's Communities of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998) underpins the framework through its emphasis on collaborative learning, professional dialogue and shared responsibility. Finally, Inclusive Education frameworks (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020) emphasise participation, equity, learner voice and the removal of barriers to engagement and achievement. The five pillars of GEIF-VET reflect these theoretical foundations.

The Awareness and Practice pillars are informed primarily by Inclusive Education and Communities of Practice perspectives, recognising the importance of attitudes, behaviours and everyday interactions in shaping educational experiences. The Systems and Measurement pillars draw heavily on Gender Mainstreaming and Organisational Change theories, reflecting the importance of governance, accountability, monitoring and continuous improvement. The Partnerships pillar aligns strongly with Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective by recognising that educational experiences are influenced not only by institutions but also by employers, families, communities and wider labour-market structures. The integrated findings from the student survey, teacher survey and policy review demonstrate that the

principal challenge facing VET systems is not a lack of commitment to gender equality but inconsistent implementation. Across all six countries, policy frameworks support equality and institutions generally demonstrate positive intentions. However, occupational segregation, unconscious bias, uncertainty regarding reporting systems and variability in practice continue to persist. The proposed GEIF-VET framework has therefore been developed as a practical mechanism for translating policy commitments into measurable institutional and cultural change.

7.2 Conceptual Structure of the Framework

Analysis of the research findings identified five interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions of gender equality implementation:

- Awareness
- Practice
- Systems
- Partnerships
- Measurement

The framework is intentionally cumulative and cyclical. Awareness develops understanding of gender bias and inequality. Practice translates awareness into inclusive teaching, learning and assessment. Systems embed equality within institutional structures and governance processes. Partnerships extend equality beyond educational settings into workplaces and communities. Measurement provides the evidence required for accountability, evaluation and continuous improvement. Rather than operating independently, the five pillars form a continuous cycle of institutional learning and organisational development.

Strategic Layer	Purpose
Awareness	Understanding gender bias and inequality
Practice	Embedding equality within teaching and learning
Systems	Establishing governance, accountability and institutional structures
Partnerships	Extending equality into workplaces and communities
Measurement	Monitoring progress, evaluating impact and driving improvement

Table 14 GEIF-VET Framework structure

Together, these pillars create a whole-system model capable of supporting sustainable gender equality implementation across vocational education and training.

7.3 Pillar 1: Awareness

The Awareness Pillar provides the foundation for the Gender Equality Implementation Framework for Vocational Education and Training (GEIF-VET). The evidence indicates that awareness of gender equality concepts is relatively high among both learners and educators; however, the ability to recognise gender bias in everyday educational and workplace contexts remains less developed. Student survey findings showed that 80% of respondents understood the concept of gender bias and 75% recognised that gender inequality can intersect with factors such as disability, ethnicity and social background. Nevertheless, the statement “I notice when people are treated differently because of their gender” generated one of the lowest mean scores in the student survey (3.49/5), with 35% of respondents

disagreeing, strongly disagreeing or indicating uncertainty. This suggests that understanding gender equality in principle does not necessarily translate into recognising bias in practice. A similar pattern emerged in the teacher and education staff survey. While 66.5% of respondents agreed that gender stereotypes influence learner confidence and participation, and 61% agreed that learners continue to make educational choices based on gender expectations, many also reported that discrimination was not a significant issue within their own institutions. This apparent contradiction highlights the influence of unconscious and implicit forms of bias that may operate through everyday assumptions, interactions and practices rather than overt discrimination.

The Awareness Pillar therefore seeks to strengthen the capacity of learners, educators and employers to identify, understand and challenge both explicit and implicit forms of gender bias. The objective is not simply to increase knowledge of gender equality, but to develop critical awareness, reflective practice and a deeper understanding of how stereotypes and social norms can influence educational experiences, occupational aspirations and workplace cultures.

Strategic Objectives

- The Awareness Pillar aims to:
- Improve understanding of unconscious and implicit bias.
- Increase awareness of occupational stereotypes and their influence on educational and career choices.
- Strengthen understanding of intersectionality and multiple forms of disadvantage.
- Improve recognition of subtle and everyday manifestations of discrimination.
- Encourage critical reflection among learners, educators and workplace partners.

Action	Target Group	Expected Outcome
Gender equality awareness workshops	Students	Increased recognition of gender bias and stereotyping
Professional development on unconscious bias	Staff	Enhanced understanding of hidden assumptions and stereotypes
AI-supported simulation scenarios	Students and staff	Improved ability to identify and respond to subtle discrimination
Equality awareness campaigns	Whole institution	Stronger culture of inclusion and equality
Reflective self-assessment tools	Staff	Increased self-awareness and critical reflection

Table 15 Awareness Pillar Actions

Awareness Pillar seeks to move institutions beyond awareness of equality terminology towards a deeper and more practical understanding of how gender bias can influence decisions, behaviours and opportunities. By strengthening recognition of unconscious bias and promoting reflective practice, VET providers can create the conditions necessary for meaningful pedagogical, cultural and organisational change.

7.4 Pillar 2: Practice

The Practice Pillar focuses on the everyday teaching, learning, assessment and guidance activities through which gender equality is either reinforced or challenged. The research findings indicate that many contemporary forms of gender bias operate through routine educational practices rather than through formal policies or overt discrimination. Teachers and trainers play a significant role in shaping learner confidence, participation, aspirations and occupational identity development. While students

generally reported positive experiences of fairness and inclusion, the evidence also highlights the continued influence of stereotypes on educational choices and classroom interactions. For example, 66.5% of staff agreed that gender stereotypes influence learner confidence, while 61% agreed that learners continue to make educational choices based on gender expectations. Furthermore, one-third of students were uncertain whether teachers actively challenge gender stereotypes. These findings suggest that pedagogical practice remains one of the most powerful mechanisms for reducing gender bias and promoting equality within VET.

The Practice Pillar builds upon awareness by translating understanding into action. Its purpose is to ensure that equality is embedded consistently across classrooms, workshops, laboratories, work-based learning environments and assessment processes. The focus is therefore on creating inclusive learning experiences that challenge assumptions, broaden aspirations and provide equitable opportunities for all learners.

Strategic Objectives

The Practice Pillar seeks to:

- Embed gender equality principles within teaching, learning and assessment activities.
- Eliminate gender-based assumptions in task allocation and learner participation.
- Strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive teaching methodologies.
- Promote balanced participation, leadership and responsibility among learners.
- Integrate gender-sensitive approaches to assessment, feedback and guidance.
- Challenge occupational stereotypes through curriculum content and learning activities.
- Encourage participation in non-traditional educational and career pathways.

Area	Traditional Practice	Inclusive Practice
Task allocation	Gender-based assumptions regarding skills and abilities	Structured or rotational allocation of tasks and responsibilities
Career examples	Traditional occupational role models	Diverse and non-traditional role models
Group leadership	Informal or self-selected leadership roles	Planned rotation of leadership opportunities
Assessment	One-size-fits-all approaches	Inclusive and gender-sensitive assessment design
Learning materials	Limited representation of genders and occupations	Balanced and diverse representation across resources

Table 16 Inclusive teaching practice

Key Activities

Gender-Inclusive Curriculum Review

Institutions should undertake regular reviews of curricula and learning materials to ensure they represent diverse experiences, challenge stereotypes and promote inclusive participation. Reviews should consider:

- Images and visual resources.
- Case studies and learning scenarios.
- Industry and workplace examples.
- Assessment tasks and project briefs.

- Learning resources and digital content.
- Careers information and guidance materials.
- Representation of diverse role models across vocational sectors.
- AI-Enhanced Reflective Learning

The BGBinVET AI-supported simulation resources can provide opportunities for learners and educators to explore realistic equality-related situations in a safe and supportive environment. Scenarios should be used to:

- Explore workplace and work-placement situations.
- Examine classroom and workshop interactions.
- Identify unconscious bias and stereotyping.
- Practise inclusive responses and interventions.
- Encourage critical reflection and discussion.
- Peer Observation and Professional Reflection

Professional development activities should include structured peer observation and reflective practice focused on inclusion and equality. Observation frameworks may examine:

- Patterns of learner participation.
- Teacher expectations and interactions.
- Questioning and feedback techniques.
- Allocation of tasks and responsibilities.
- Learner confidence and engagement.
- Representation within teaching materials and examples.

The ultimate goal of the Practice Pillar is to ensure that gender equality is experienced through everyday educational activities rather than existing solely as a policy objective. By embedding inclusive teaching approaches, diversifying learning materials, challenging occupational stereotypes and promoting reflective professional practice, VET institutions can create learning environments in which participation, achievement and career aspirations are determined by individual interests, talents and potential rather than gender expectations. In doing so, the Practice Pillar directly supports the reduction of occupational segregation and contributes to more equitable outcomes for learners across vocational education and training systems.

7.5 Pillar 3: Systems

The Systems Pillar recognises that sustainable gender equality cannot depend solely on individual commitment or isolated examples of good practice. While the research found high levels of institutional commitment to equality, it also identified uncertainty regarding reporting procedures, implementation consistency and accountability mechanisms. Approximately 80% of staff agreed that their institution was committed to equality and inclusion, and 74% of students believed their VET provider was committed to fairness. However, only 57% of students agreed that reporting procedures were clearly explained, while 28% reported uncertainty. Similarly, although almost 60% of staff agreed that reporting systems existed, more than one-third remained uncertain about their effectiveness. These findings suggest that many institutions have established equality policies and procedures but have been less successful in ensuring that they are visible, accessible and trusted by learners and staff. The Systems Pillar therefore focuses

on embedding gender equality within institutional structures, governance arrangements and accountability processes. Its purpose is to move equality from a policy aspiration to an operational reality supported by clear responsibilities, monitoring arrangements and continuous improvement mechanisms.

Strategic Objectives

The Systems Pillar seeks to:

- Strengthen Gender Equality Plans and implementation processes.
- Improve the visibility, accessibility and effectiveness of reporting systems.
- Increase institutional accountability for equality outcomes.
- Support leadership engagement and governance oversight.
- Strengthen equality monitoring and continuous improvement.
- Ensure policies and procedures are understood by learners and staff.

System Element	Purpose
Gender Equality Plan	Strategic direction and implementation
Equality Steering Group	Governance and oversight
Reporting Mechanism	Reporting, support and case management
Equality Dashboard	Monitoring progress and performance
Annual Equality Review	Evaluation and continuous improvement

Table 17 Institutional equality systems

Gender Equality Plans

Drawing on examples from Finland and other high-performing systems, institutions should develop comprehensive Gender Equality Plans that include:

- Strategic objectives and priorities.
- Measurable performance indicators.
- Learner and staff participation.
- Leadership accountability.
- Monitoring and reporting arrangements.
- Annual review and improvement processes.
- Reporting Systems

The evidence indicates considerable uncertainty regarding reporting procedures and confidence in their effectiveness. Effective reporting systems should therefore be:

- Visible
- Included in student induction programmes.
- Included in staff induction programmes.
- Prominently displayed on institutional websites.
- Accessible through virtual learning environments and digital platforms.
- Accessible
- Multiple reporting channels.

- Anonymous reporting options.
- Clear and user-friendly procedures.
- Appropriate support services.
- Trusted
- Confidentiality protections.
- Clearly defined response timelines.
- Transparent processes and outcomes.
- Regular communication regarding available supports.

The ultimate aim of the Systems Pillar is to create institutional environments in which equality is supported through robust governance, trusted reporting mechanisms, effective monitoring and accountable leadership. By embedding equality within organisational systems, institutions can ensure that gender equality is sustained over time and does not depend solely on individual commitment or local initiatives.

7.6 Pillar 4: Partnerships

The Partnerships Pillar extends gender equality beyond the boundaries of educational institutions and recognises that meaningful change requires collaboration with employers, industry, communities and wider society. The research consistently identified employers as critical but underutilised stakeholders in efforts to reduce gender bias and occupational segregation. While workplace learning experiences were generally viewed positively, there was limited evidence that employers actively challenged stereotypes or promoted gender equality as part of workplace practice. Students generally reported positive workplace learning experiences, with 66% agreeing that workplace supervisors treated learners equally. Staff responses were similarly positive, with 81.5% agreeing that placements were safe environments and 77.9% agreeing that workplace supervisors treated learners equally. However, almost half of teacher respondents selected neutral responses when asked whether employers actively challenge gender stereotypes. This suggests that many employers provide inclusive environments but remain passive rather than proactive in addressing occupational stereotypes. The Partnerships Pillar therefore seeks to strengthen collaboration between VET providers, employers, professional bodies, communities and learners to ensure that gender equality is supported throughout the learner journey and beyond graduation.

Strategic Objectives

The Partnerships Pillar seeks to:

- Engage employers as active equality partners.
- Strengthen equality within workplace learning.
- Promote community awareness and outreach.
- Increase visibility of diverse occupational role models.
- Reduce occupational segregation.
- Support mentoring and career exploration opportunities.
- Extend equality initiatives beyond educational settings.

Stakeholder	Contribution
Employers	Inclusive workplace learning and mentoring
Industry Associations	Equality standards and advocacy
Community Organisations	Outreach and awareness activities
Learners	Peer leadership and advocacy
Alumni	Diverse role-model networks

Table 18 Partnership model

Employer Equality Charter

The project could develop an Employer Equality Charter encouraging placement providers to commit to:

- Equality in task allocation and responsibilities.
- Equal access to learning opportunities.
- Active challenge of stereotypes.
- Inclusive workplace cultures.
- Equality awareness training for supervisors.
- Support for reporting and safeguarding procedures.
- Mentoring and Role Model Networks

Institutions should develop mentoring networks that connect learners with professionals working in non-traditional occupational pathways, including:

- Female engineers and technicians.
- Male healthcare professionals.
- Women in construction and manufacturing.
- Men working in early childhood education and care.

Professionals who have successfully entered occupations where their gender is traditionally underrepresented. Such initiatives provide visible alternatives to traditional occupational expectations and directly address the occupational segregation identified across all six participating countries.

The Partnerships Pillar aims to ensure that gender equality extends beyond the classroom and becomes embedded within workplaces, communities and professional networks. By engaging employers as active partners, promoting diverse role models and supporting mentoring opportunities, institutions can help challenge occupational stereotypes and create more inclusive pathways into education, training and employment.

7.7 Pillar 5: Measurement

The Measurement Pillar focuses on monitoring progress, evaluating impact and generating evidence to support continuous improvement. Across the policy reviews, one of the clearest distinctions between more mature and less mature gender equality systems was the strength of their monitoring and accountability arrangements. Finland emerged as the strongest example of practice, characterised by mandatory equality planning, institutional accountability and continuous evaluation processes, while several other countries reported challenges in collecting, analysing and using equality data consistently. The survey findings further reinforce the importance of measurement. Although 74% of students agreed that their VET institution is committed to gender fairness and almost 80% of staff reported strong

institutional commitment to equality, there was considerably less confidence in institutional processes and reporting mechanisms. Only 57% of students agreed that reporting procedures were clearly explained, while 28% remained uncertain. Similarly, although almost 60% of staff agreed that reporting systems existed, more than one-third expressed uncertainty regarding their effectiveness. These findings suggest that commitment alone is insufficient. Institutions require robust evidence systems to determine whether equality policies and initiatives are producing meaningful and measurable outcomes. The purpose of the Measurement Pillar is therefore to ensure that gender equality initiatives are not only implemented, but systematically evaluated. Through the use of meaningful indicators, reliable data collection and regular review processes, institutions can identify progress, address gaps and strengthen accountability. Measurement becomes the mechanism through which institutions move from intention to demonstrable impact.

Strategic Objectives

The Measurement Pillar seeks to:

- Generate reliable and consistent equality data.
- Monitor progress towards institutional equality objectives.
- Support evidence-informed decision-making.
- Demonstrate the impact of equality initiatives.
- Strengthen accountability and transparency.
- Support continuous improvement and organisational learning.
- Enable benchmarking over time and across institutions.
- Core Equality Indicators

Institutions should establish a set of core indicators that provide a balanced view of participation, outcomes, culture and organisational performance.

Domain	Measure
Participation	Gender balance by programme, sector and pathway
Achievement	Retention, completion and achievement rates
Progression	Progression to employment, apprenticeships or further study
Culture	Student and staff perceptions of equality, inclusion and safety
Leadership	Gender representation in leadership and decision-making roles
Reporting	Number, nature and resolution of equality-related concerns
Professional Development	Participation in equality and inclusion training
Workplace Learning	Placement participation and employer engagement

Table 19 Key equality indicators

Equality Dashboard

Institutions should develop an annual Equality Dashboard that provides a clear overview of performance, supports strategic planning and enables continuous improvement.

Learners

- Enrolment patterns by programme and gender.
- Participation in non-traditional pathways.

- Retention and completion rates.
- Achievement and progression outcomes.
- Student perceptions of inclusion, fairness and safety.
- Awareness and use of reporting procedures.

Staff

- Recruitment and promotion patterns.
- Participation in equality-related professional development.
- Leadership representation.
- Staff perceptions of organisational culture and inclusion.

Workplace Learning

- Placement participation rates.
- Employer engagement in equality initiatives.
- Learner experiences of workplace learning.
- Equality audit findings and improvement actions.
- Employer participation in mentoring and role-model programmes.

Dashboard findings should be reviewed annually and integrated into institutional planning, governance and quality assurance processes to ensure that equality objectives remain visible, measurable and actionable.

Gender Equality Maturity and Progression Model

The Measurement Pillar supports institutional development through a staged maturity framework that enables organisations to assess progress and identify priorities for further improvement.

Stage	Characteristics
Level 1: Awareness	Equality is recognised as an important issue and discussed within the institution
Level 2: Emerging Practice	Individual equality initiatives and local actions are evident
Level 3: Institutional Practice	Equality is embedded within teaching, learning and learner-support practices
Level 4: Strategic Integration	Equality is embedded within governance, planning, monitoring and decision-making systems
Level 5: Transformational Practice	Continuous improvement is supported by evidence, accountability and demonstrable impact

Table 20 Gender equality maturity model

The ultimate aim of the Measurement Pillar is to ensure that progress towards gender equality is visible, measurable and evidence-based. While awareness, practice, systems and partnerships create the conditions for change, measurement provides the mechanism through which impact can be demonstrated and sustained. By establishing robust indicators, transparent reporting mechanisms and continuous review processes, institutions can move beyond compliance and demonstrate meaningful improvements in participation, inclusion, progression and organisational culture. In this way, measurement becomes not simply a monitoring exercise but a driver of accountability, institutional learning and long-term transformation

7.8 Framework Summary

The GEIF-VET framework provides a practical pathway for translating policy commitments into measurable institutional and cultural change. The framework is founded on the principle that sustainable gender equality cannot be achieved through isolated interventions. Awareness without Practice does not change behaviour. Practice without Systems leads to inconsistency. Systems without Partnerships fail to address the wider influences shaping occupational choices and workplace experiences. Measurement without action generates data but not improvement. Conversely, when all five pillars operate together, institutions create the conditions necessary for sustainable equality, accountability and organisational learning. Awareness develops understanding of gender bias. Practice embeds equality within teaching and learning. Systems establish the structures required for implementation. Partnerships connect institutions with workplaces and communities. Measurement ensures that progress is monitored, evaluated and continuously improved.

The framework therefore functions as a continuous improvement cycle in which evidence informs action, action is embedded through institutional systems, systems are strengthened through partnerships and outcomes are evaluated through measurement. Through this process, institutions can progress from awareness and compliance towards transformational practice and sustainable cultural change. The GEIF-VET framework is therefore intended not only as an output of the BGBinVET project, but also as a scalable European model capable of supporting gender equality implementation across diverse vocational education and training contexts.

8. Priorities and Recommendations

8.1 Considering the findings

The findings from the student survey, teacher survey, and policy review demonstrate that the challenge facing VET systems is no longer the absence of gender equality policies or institutional commitment. Rather, the challenge concerns implementation, consistency, visibility, and impact. Across all participating countries, gender equality is recognised as an important educational and societal objective. Students report generally positive experiences, teachers express a commitment to inclusion, and policymakers have established extensive legislative and strategic frameworks. Yet occupational segregation, unconscious bias, gendered expectations, and uneven implementation remain persistent features of VET environments.

The evidence suggests that achieving meaningful progress requires a shift from policy compliance towards whole-system transformation. This section therefore presents a strategic roadmap structured around four key stakeholder groups:

- Policymakers
- Institutional Leaders
- Teachers and Education Staff
- Students and Learners

The recommendations recognise that gender equality is a shared responsibility. No single stakeholder group possesses sufficient influence to address gender bias independently. Sustainable change requires coordinated action across governance, leadership, pedagogy, workplace learning, and student engagement.

8.2 Strategic Vision

The long-term vision emerging from the BGBinVET research can be summarised as follows:

A VET system in which educational participation, learning experiences, occupational choices, and employment outcomes are determined by individual interests, abilities and aspirations rather than by gender expectations or stereotypes.

Achieving this vision requires intervention across three interconnected levels, structural, cultural and practice.

Structural Level

- Policy, governance, resources, monitoring and accountability.

Cultural Level

- Values, attitudes, expectations and social norms.

Practice Level

- Teaching, assessment, guidance, workplace learning and everyday interactions.

Level	Focus	Main Actors
Structural	Policy, governance, accountability	Policymakers and institutional leaders
Cultural	Beliefs, norms, stereotypes	Leaders, teachers, employers and students
Practice	Teaching, assessment, guidance, placements	Teachers, trainers and employers

Table 21 Levels of intervention equality

8.3 Strategic Recommendations for Policymakers

Move from Policy Development to Policy Implementation

The policy reviews demonstrate that all six countries possess significant legislative and strategic frameworks related to gender equality. However, implementation quality varies considerably between countries and institutions. Finland demonstrates the strongest policy-to-practice alignment, while Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye identify implementation as a continuing challenge. Ireland similarly reports variable implementation across vocational sectors.

Recommendation

Policymakers should prioritise implementation support rather than additional policy production. Key actions include:

- National implementation toolkits.
- Institutional self-assessment frameworks.
- Equality implementation grants.
- Regional implementation support networks.
- Expected Impact
- Greater policy consistency.
- Improved institutional ownership.
- Reduced implementation variability.

Establish National Gender Equality Indicators for VET

Current monitoring systems vary considerably across participating countries. In many cases, equality policies exist but progress remains difficult to evaluate because institutions collect different types of data or collect data inconsistently.

Recommendation

- Introduce common indicators that monitor:
- Enrolment by gender.
- Programme participation.
- Completion rates.
- Learner satisfaction.
- Leadership representation.
- Placement outcomes.
- Progression into employment.

Indicator Area	Example Measure
Access	Female participation in engineering pathways
Achievement	Programme completion by gender
Progression	Employment outcomes by gender
Leadership	Gender representation in leadership positions
Workplace Learning	Equality participation during placements

Table 22 Recommendations national equality indicators

Strengthen Employer Accountability

Workplace learning remains one of the most influential aspects of VET.

However, teacher survey findings demonstrate uncertainty regarding employers' willingness to challenge gender stereotypes actively, with approximately half of respondents unable to confirm whether such actions occur during placements.

Recommendation

- Develop national equality standards for employers participating in work-based learning.
- Requirements could include:
- Equality induction processes.
- Supervisor training.
- Placement equality audits.
- Equality reporting procedures.
- Expected Impact
- Improved workplace inclusion.
- Reduced occupational stereotyping.
- Stronger educational-employer alignment.

8.4 Recommendations for Institutional Leaders

Develop Whole-Institution Gender Equality Plans

The strongest systems identified within the policy review involve institutional ownership of equality initiatives rather than relying solely on national policy direction.

Finland provides the clearest example through mandatory Equality Plans integrated into governance and continuous improvement processes.

Recommendation

Every institution should develop a Gender Equality Plan containing:

- Strategic objectives.
- Annual targets.
- Performance indicators.
- Learner participation structures.
- Evaluation mechanisms.

Component	Purpose
Strategic Objectives	Define institutional priorities
Action Plan	Identify activities and responsibilities
Monitoring Framework	Measure progress
Reporting Mechanism	Track implementation
Review Process	Ensure continuous improvement

Table 23 Components of gender equality plan

Visible and Trusted Reporting Systems

One of the most significant findings from both surveys concerns uncertainty regarding gender-related reporting procedures. Only 57% of learners agreed that reporting systems were clearly explained, while over one quarter expressed uncertainty. Teachers reported similar concerns.

Recommendation

Institutional leaders should ensure reporting systems are:

- Visible
- Included in induction programmes.
- Displayed throughout campuses.
- Integrated into digital learning systems.
- Accessible
- Online reporting options.
- Anonymous reporting.
- Multiple communication channels.
- Trusted
- Defined response timelines.
- Confidentiality protections.

- Transparent review processes.

Equality Leadership and Governance

Institutional culture is influenced significantly by leadership behaviour.

Although most respondents believed leadership structures were broadly equitable, qualitative evidence suggested continuing gender imbalances in senior and technical positions.

Recommendation

Leaders should:

- Model inclusive practice.
- Monitor inequalities actively.
- Promote representation.
- Embed equality into strategic planning.

8.5 Recommendations for Teachers and Education Staff

Move Beyond Awareness Towards Reflective Practice

The teacher survey reveals high awareness of gender equality but continuing difficulty in recognising how gender assumptions shape everyday teaching decisions.

Recommendation

Professional development should focus on:

- Unconscious bias.
- Inclusive pedagogy.
- Reflective practice.
- Gender-sensitive assessment.

Development Area	Purpose
Unconscious Bias	Improve recognition of hidden assumptions
Inclusive Pedagogy	Enhance participation and engagement
Gender-Sensitive Guidance	Reduce occupational segregation
Reflective Practice	Support behavioural change
Equality Leadership	Develop organisational influence

Table 24 Teacher development priorities

Transform Career Guidance Processes

Teacher responses consistently highlight the continuing influence of stereotypes on learner choices. Sixty-one percent agreed that learners continue to make educational decisions based on gender expectations.

Recommendation

Career guidance should:

- Challenge assumptions explicitly.
- Showcase diverse occupational pathways.

- Promote non-traditional careers.
- Use role models strategically.
- Expected Impact
- More diverse participation.
- Reduced occupational segregation.
- Expanded learner aspirations.

Use AI-Supported Simulation Learning

One of the central innovations of BGBinVET is the development of AI-supported simulations.

Recommendation

Simulation scenarios should focus on:

- Classroom interactions.
- Workplace placements.
- Recruitment situations.
- Leadership decisions.
- Harassment and reporting scenarios.
- Benefits
- AI allows participants to:
- Experience realistic situations.
- Explore consequences.
- Practice intervention strategies.
- Develop reflective capacity.

8.6 Recommendations for Students and Learners

Strengthen Student Voice

The student survey demonstrates that learners want opportunities to express concerns and contribute to equality initiatives. Qualitative responses repeatedly referenced a desire to be heard and to participate in decision-making.

Recommendation

Institutions should establish:

- Student equality committees.
- Equality ambassador programmes.
- Student consultation forums.
- Peer-support initiatives.
- Expected Impact
- Increased engagement.
- Greater confidence.
- More responsive institutions.

Increase Reporting Confidence

A substantial minority of students expressed uncertainty regarding reporting systems and confidence in raising concerns.

Recommendation

Students should receive:

- Reporting training during induction.
- Clear procedural information.
- Regular reminders.
- Opportunities to discuss equality concerns safely.

Promote Learner Leadership

Students should not be viewed solely as beneficiaries of gender equality initiatives. They should also be recognised as active contributors to institutional change.

Recommendation

Create learner equality ambassador networks that:

- Promote awareness.
- Challenge stereotypes.
- Support peers.
- Contribute to institutional planning.

8.7 Integrated Stakeholder Action Plan

Stakeholder	Primary Responsibility	Strategic Focus
Polymakers	Governance and resources	Monitoring, accountability, implementation
Institutional Leaders	Culture and systems	Equality plans, reporting, leadership
Teachers	Practice and pedagogy	Teaching, guidance, reflection
Employers	Workplace inclusion	Placements, mentoring, role modelling
Students	Engagement and participation	Student voice, advocacy, feedback

Table 25 Summary of stakeholder responsibility

8.8 Strategic Roadmap for BGBinVET

Short-Term (Year 1)

- Develop Gender Equality Implementation Framework.
- Create AI learning scenarios.
- Establish reporting guidelines.
- Develop professional development resources.

Medium-Term (Years 2-3)

- Implement Equality Plans.
- Train equality ambassadors.
- Launch employer engagement programme.

- Introduce equality dashboards.

Long-Term (Years 4-5)

- Measure impact.
- Scale framework nationally and internationally.
- Establish European VET equality benchmark.
- Disseminate best practice models.

Stage	Outcome
Awareness	Understanding bias
Engagement	Participation and reflection
Implementation	Institutional practice
Accountability	Monitoring and evaluation
Transformation	Sustainable cultural change

Table 26 BGBinVET Transformation pathway

8.9 Strategic Implications

The integrated findings demonstrate that meaningful gender equality in VET requires a shift from awareness to action, from compliance to culture change, and from isolated initiatives to coordinated system-wide transformation. Strong policy frameworks already exist across participating countries, and learners and educators generally express strong support for equality objectives. However, persistent stereotypes, hidden bias, occupational segregation, and implementation gaps indicate that substantial work remains. The recommendations presented here provide a practical roadmap for policymakers, leaders, teachers, employers and learners. Together they support the development of a VET system in which participation, achievement and career progression are determined not by gender expectations but by individual interests, talents and aspirations. The proposed framework therefore offers not only a strategy for the BGBinVET project but also a transferable model capable of informing broader European efforts to create more inclusive and equitable vocational education systems.

9. Conclusion and Strategic Way Forward

This study set out to examine gender equality within Vocational Education and Training (VET) through three interconnected perspectives: learners, educators, and policy frameworks. Drawing together evidence from the student survey (n=564), teacher and education staff survey (n=201), and policy reviews across Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, and Türkiye, the findings present both a positive and challenging picture of gender equality in European VET systems

At the most positive level, the findings demonstrate that gender equality is firmly established as a priority within participating countries. Students reported high levels of awareness of gender bias, strong perceptions of safety and respect, and generally positive attitudes towards institutional commitments to equality. Similarly, teachers and education staff reported strong organisational support for equality, confidence in addressing gender-related issues, and recognition of the importance of inclusive educational practice. National policy reviews further confirmed that all participating countries have developed substantial legislative and strategic frameworks to promote gender equality within education and training.

However, beneath these positive indicators lies a more nuanced reality. The research demonstrates that significant gaps remain between policy aspirations, institutional commitments, and everyday practice. While equality is widely understood and supported in principle, subtle forms of gender bias continue to shape learner experiences, educational pathways, workplace placements, and career expectations. Teachers consistently described unconscious assumptions regarding learner capabilities, occupational suitability, and classroom participation. Students demonstrated strong awareness of equality concepts while showing lower levels of confidence in identifying gender bias in practice. This suggests that many contemporary forms of inequality operate below the level of conscious recognition and therefore remain difficult to challenge effectively.

A particularly important finding concerns occupational segregation. Across all six countries, policy reviews identified persistent gender imbalances within vocational pathways. Technical sectors continue to attract predominantly male learners, while health, care, and service-oriented sectors continue to attract predominantly female learners. Despite extensive policy efforts, educational choices remain strongly influenced by social norms, family expectations, labour market structures, and cultural perceptions of "appropriate" occupations for women and men. This finding suggests that achieving gender equality requires more than improving access to education. It requires a sustained effort to challenge stereotypes throughout the learner journey. The findings also indicate that employers and workplace learning environments represent a critical frontier for future development. While students and teachers generally reported positive workplace experiences, there was limited evidence that employers actively challenge gender stereotypes. Work placements appear largely equitable but often remain passive in their approach to equality. As workplace learning is a fundamental component of VET systems, stronger employer engagement will be critical if educational interventions are to influence labour-market outcomes meaningfully.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this research is the identification of the awareness-implementation gap. Strong policy frameworks, supportive institutional cultures, and positive attitudes towards equality are necessary conditions for change, but they are not sufficient on their own. Sustainable progress requires visible implementation, active leadership, reflective teaching practice, meaningful learner engagement, robust monitoring systems, and stronger partnerships between education providers and employers. For this reason, the report proposed the Gender Equality Implementation Framework for VET (GEIF-VET). The framework provides a practical model for moving beyond awareness towards measurable improvement by integrating five interdependent dimensions: Awareness, Practice, Systems, Partnerships, and Measurement. Together, these pillars create the conditions necessary for long-term institutional and cultural transformation.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that the future challenge for VET systems is not whether gender equality matters, but how effectively systems can translate commitment into action. Success will depend on the capacity of policymakers, institutional leaders, teachers, employers, and learners to work collectively towards learning and working environments in which opportunities are determined by talent, ambition, and potential rather than gender expectations.

9.1 Summary of Strategic Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Primary Stakeholder	Expected Impact
1	Develop a Gender Equality Maturity Model for VET institutions	Policymakers / Leaders	Creates clear progression pathway from awareness to transformational practice

No.	Recommendation	Primary Stakeholder	Expected Impact
2	Introduce mandatory professional development in unconscious bias and inclusive pedagogy	Policymakers / Leaders / Teachers	Improves recognition and challenge of hidden bias
3	Implement AI-enhanced simulation learning for staff and learners	Leaders / Teachers	Strengthens practical recognition of gender bias
4	Strengthen Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) within VET institutions	Leaders	Embeds equality into governance and institutional strategy
5	Establish visible, accessible and trusted reporting procedures	Leaders	Improves confidence in addressing gender-related concerns
6	Integrate gender-sensitive curriculum review processes	Teachers / Leaders	Reduces stereotypical representation in learning materials
7	Reform career guidance using non-traditional role models and pathways	Teachers / Policymakers	Reduces occupational segregation
8	Develop equality ambassador programmes involving staff and students	Leaders / Students	Strengthens equality culture and student voice
9	Introduce employer equality standards for work placements	Policymakers / Employers	Improves workplace learning experiences
10	Create employer mentoring and role-model initiatives	Employers / Leaders	Encourages participation in non-traditional sectors
11	Collect and analyse gender-disaggregated institutional data	Leaders / Policymakers	Enables evidence-informed decision making
12	Develop annual equality dashboards and institutional audits	Leaders	Supports accountability and continuous improvement
13	Strengthen student consultation and participation structures	Students / Leaders	Ensures learner experiences inform institutional decisions
14	Promote leadership development opportunities for underrepresented groups	Leaders / Policymakers	Improves representation and organisational diversity
15	Create a European VET Gender Equality Benchmark Framework	Policymakers / Project Partners	Supports cross-country comparison and knowledge exchange

Table 27 Summary of key recommendations and responsibility

Stakeholder	Top Priorities
Policymakers	Monitoring frameworks; implementation support; employer standards; national equality indicators
Institutional Leaders	Gender Equality Plans; reporting systems; equality governance; organisational culture
Teachers and Trainers	Inclusive pedagogy; reflective practice; curriculum review; equality-focused guidance
Employers	Inclusive placements; mentoring; workplace equality standards; stereotype challenge
Students and Learners	Equality ambassadors; reporting confidence; learner voice; peer advocacy

Table 28 Summary of priority actions

Strategic Area	Evidence Base	Proposed Output	Stakeholder
Hidden Bias	Students and teachers struggle to recognise bias	AI Simulation Platform	Teachers
Occupational Segregation	Present in all countries	Career Guidance Toolkit	Students
Reporting Systems	High uncertainty	Equality Reporting Framework	Leaders
Employer Engagement	Passive equality	Employer Equality Charter	Employers
Monitoring	Variable across countries	Equality Dashboard	Policymakers

Table 29 Priority actions for BGBinVET project

9.2 Final Reflection

The BGBinVET research demonstrates that Europe has made considerable progress in establishing the foundations for gender equality in VET. The next stage of development requires a transition from policy to implementation, from awareness to practice, and from commitment to measurable impact. If the recommendations outlined in this report are implemented systematically, VET systems have the potential not only to reduce gender bias but also to contribute significantly to more inclusive labour markets, more diverse industries, and more equitable societies

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BGBinVET Project Reports (Recommended Citation)

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August 2026

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2025-1-IE01-KA220-VET-000358467



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or Léargas, The Exchange Bureau. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.