

75inQ Public Comment:

European strategy for vocational education and training to strengthen EU competitiveness.

Introduction

75inQ welcomes the Commission's initiative in drafting the Commission communication on a European strategy for vocational education and training to strengthen EU competitiveness. Our values align with the intentions of ensuring gender balance in the strategic VET fields for EU competitiveness. We find it important to further stress its importance, both for women and for the development of the EU's competitiveness, and to propose a specific approach to making such a change.

Comment

Crucial points of the EU's future as a market and as a group of nations lie in the achievement of gender balance in all fields. The STEM field, crucial for innovation, technological advancement, the energy transition and thus our future livelihoods,¹ remains highly unequal. Women represent only 1 in 3 STEM graduates and 1 in 5 ICT specialists.²

Women show higher academic performance in STEM fields, consistently.³ Yet, they also exhibit higher dropout rates. These rates are explained and researched. Most often, the reasons cited are the felt and perceived unfriendliness of the STEM field for women and the lack of perspective in building a life and career in STEM, due to a lack of role models.⁴ To mitigate such issues, it is crucial to increase gender awareness in the relevant VET fields.

The STEM participatory rates are clear: in the EU, 88% of women participate in STEM education at secondary level, 35% at tertiary level, and only 30% become STEM graduates.⁵ There is a crucial need for action in retaining women in the field. It is not enough to have opened the fields in question to women, but it is crucial to build a culture where women are encouraged to pursue

¹ *The Draghi report on EU competitiveness.* (2024). European Commission.
https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en

² Eurostat, 2022, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/women-digital>

³ Lee, W. C., & Matusovich, H. M. (2016). A Model Of Co-Curricular Support For Undergraduate Engineering Students. *Journal Of Engineering Education*, 105(3), 406-430. <https://doi.org/10.102/jee.20123>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *View of Bridging the gender gap in STEM education: Analyzing the role of mentorship, curriculum design, and policy interventions in encouraging female participation.* (2025.).
<https://ijsse.salmaedusociety.com/index.php/ijsse/article/view/385/308>

these careers. Formal mentorship programmes for women increase the retention rate of a degree from 64% to 82%.⁶ They increase the STEM identity score of women from 3.2 to 4.2 (scale of 1-5). Both these effects cater to the reasons women cite for exiting STEM VET.

Targeted policies are needed to ensure that the strategic VET fields at hand, and that truly need development, do not develop in a direction that embeds gendered inequality further into our societies.

Suggestions

To achieve gender equality in strategic VET fields, we suggest that the Commission Communication encourage Member States to:

1. Establish formal mentoring programmes for women in STEM fields
 - a. At secondary VET level
 - b. At tertiary VET levels
2. Conduct women in STEM awareness campaigns
3. Establish gender-specific retention policies in STEM VETs

About 75InQ:

The 75inQ foundation works to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy by promoting gender equality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations. The Dutch foundation conducts research, awareness campaigns, community outreach and facilitation to pursue these objectives. 75inQ focuses on SDG7 and SDG5 by accelerating diversity in the energy sector towards a more inclusive and sustainable energy transition. 75inQ has an active community of 1400 female professionals in the energy sector.

⁶ View of Bridging the gender gap in STEM education: Analyzing the role of mentorship, curriculum design, and policy interventions in encouraging female participation. (2025.).
<https://ijsse.salmaedusociety.com/index.php/ijsse/article/view/385/308>