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Women on Board

Gender Parity in the Blue Economy Synthesis Report

27 JULY 2026

Women on Board: Promoting Inclusion and Equality for Women in the Blue Economy Labour Market

Women On Board Project

Women on Board is an Interreg Europe project dedicated to promoting inclusion and equality for women in the blue economy labour market. The project brings together partners from Cyprus, Belgium, Norway, Albania, Greece, Germany, France and Romania to address gender imbalances and improve opportunities for women across a wide range of blue economy sectors, including maritime transport, ports, fisheries, aquaculture, coastal tourism, logistics, shipbuilding, marine research, renewable energy and other emerging blue industries.

Despite the growing importance of the blue economy for sustainable development, innovation and employment, women remain significantly underrepresented in many maritime and blue economy professions. This gender imbalance limits women's access to quality employment and career progression opportunities, while also reducing the competitiveness, innovation capacity and social impact of blue economy industries and organisations.

In response to these challenges, Women on Board seeks to improve regional development policies and policy instruments by increasing women's participation, career advancement, leadership representation and long-term retention in the blue economy. The project focuses on challenging persistent gender stereotypes, promoting more inclusive training and employment pathways, and supporting the creation of safer and more attractive working environments for women across the sector.

Through interregional cooperation, stakeholder engagement, the exchange of experiences and the transfer of good practices, project partners work together to identify and promote effective policy solutions that can reduce barriers to women's participation in blue economy professions. The project also aims to strengthen the involvement of women in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes affecting the blue economy, ensuring that future development is both inclusive and sustainable.

Women on Board contributes to the objectives of Interreg Europe Policy Objective 4: A More Social Europe, supporting more effective and inclusive labour markets, equal access to quality employment opportunities, and a stronger and more inclusive blue economy across participating regions.

Programme: Interreg Europe 2021-2027

Project Duration: May 2025 – April 2029

Total Budget: €1,755,206.00

Project Website: www.interregeurope.eu/women-on-board

Partners

Larnaca and Famagusta Districts Development Agency - Cyprus (Lead Partner)

Autonomous Provincial Company Port Center – Belgium

Blue Centre of Competence – Norway

Saranda Municipality – Albania

KMOP Social Action and Innovation Centre – Greece

MARIKO Maritime Competence Center non-profit organization – Germany

Region of Western Greece – Greece

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Executive Summary

This synthesis brings together seven regional mappings from the Women on Board project to identify what is common, what differs, and what policymakers can do to improve women's participation, progression and long-term inclusion in the blue economy. Across the seven regions, the evidence points to a consistent conclusion: women are already part of the blue economy, but participation is uneven across sectors and occupations, and presence alone does not guarantee equal access to influence, progression, safety, recognition or long-term career opportunities. The barriers identified are not confined to one country or one industry. They recur in different forms across ports, shipping, aquaculture, fisheries, tourism, offshore energy, research, technology and blue-economy support services.

The main challenge is not simply to attract more women into the blue economy. It is to create the conditions in which people can enter, belong, develop, lead and remain in the sector throughout different stages of working life.

The reports also show why this matters beyond gender equality. Many blue-economy regions face labour shortages, changing competence needs, demographic pressure and rapid green and digital transitions. Excluding or losing qualified workers reduces the talent pool available to industries that depend on innovation, specialist competence and long-term workforce development. More inclusive systems therefore support both social inclusion and value creation.

Seven cross-regional findings

Although the participating regions differ in their blue-economy activities, labour markets and policy contexts, the analysis reveals a set of common challenges affecting women's integration in the sector. The following seven cross-regional findings capture the most recurring patterns identified across the regional reports and form the basis for the policy framework proposed in this synthesis.

Finding	What the regional evidence shows
1. Entry is gendered before recruitment begins	Stereotypes, limited visibility of women and narrow images of blue-economy work influence educational choices, occupational aspirations and who sees the sector as open to them.
2. Participation remains horizontally and vertically segregated	Women are more often concentrated in administrative, service, support, tourism and selected professional roles, while technical, operational, sea-based and some STEM-intensive roles remain strongly male-dominated, while several regions concurrently report the glass-ceiling effect.
3. Progression is not equal to participation	Across several regions, women face less transparent promotion pathways, weaker access to mentoring, networks and specialised training, unequal recognition of competence and underrepresentation in senior decision-making roles.
4. Work organisation shapes retention	Irregular schedules, long absences, inflexible shift systems, care responsibilities, inadequate facilities and limited practical adaptation can restrict who is able to stay and progress. This disproportionately affects women due to social expectations in the private sphere.
5. Formal equality is not the same as lived inclusion	Positive workplace satisfaction can coexist with bias, exclusion, harassment, unequal recognition and informal cultures that make participation more difficult.
6. Policy ambition often exceeds implementation	Many regions already have strong equality, skills or blue-growth strategies, but gender considerations are not always translated into operational measures, accountability, indicators and workplace practice.
7. Better data is a prerequisite for better policy	Regional and sector-specific gender-disaggregated data remain uneven. This makes it difficult to distinguish where progress is happening, where people are being lost and which interventions work.

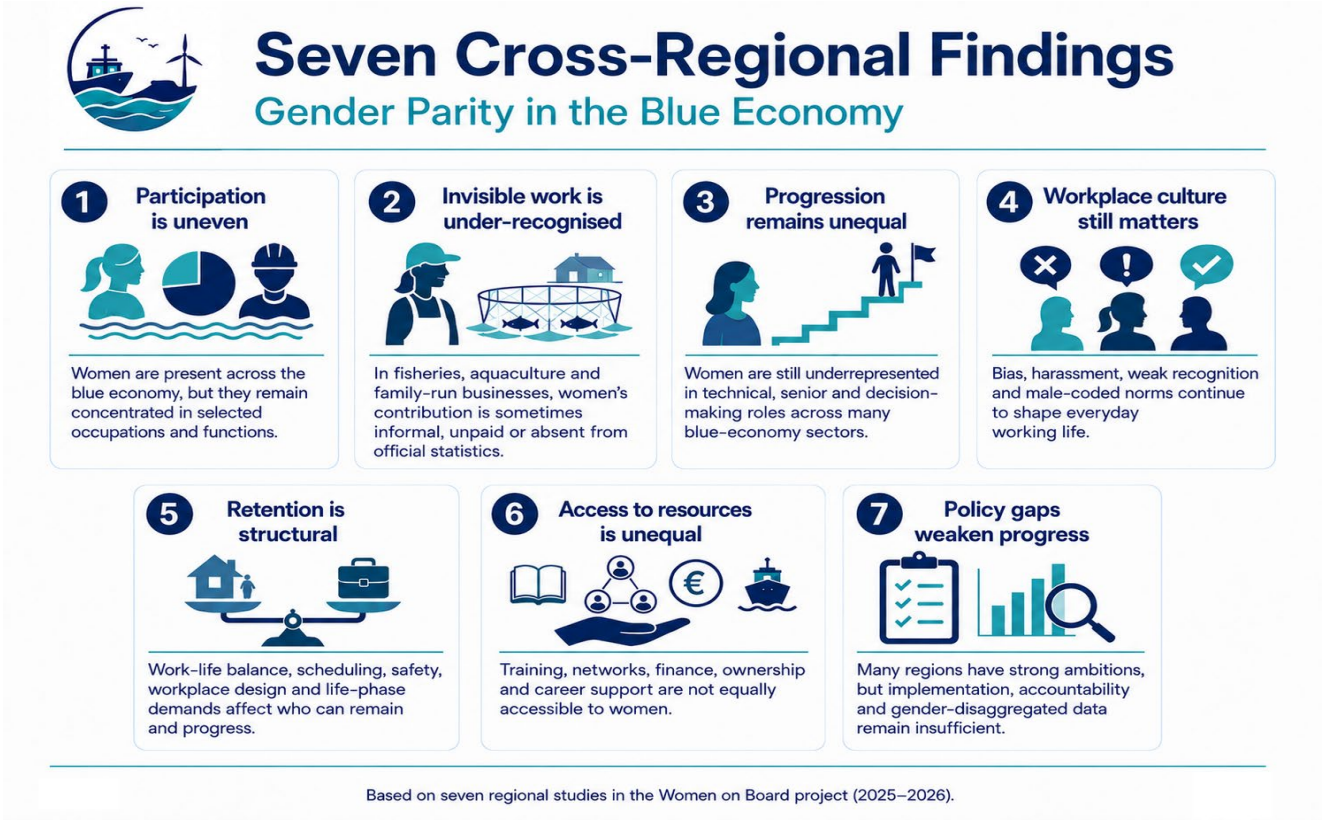

Figure 1: Seven Cross-Regional Findings in visual form.

Women on Board Policy Recommendations Framework for an Inclusive Blue Economy

Based on the evidence gathered across the seven participating regions, the Women on Board Policy Recommendations Framework translates common challenges and opportunities into a practical roadmap for action. Rather than focusing on single interventions, the framework adopts a lifecycle perspective, recognising that inclusion is shaped by the conditions that influence attraction, entry, participation, development, leadership and retention throughout working life. The framework is intended to support policy improvement, stakeholder dialogue and the design of more inclusive blue-economy labour markets.

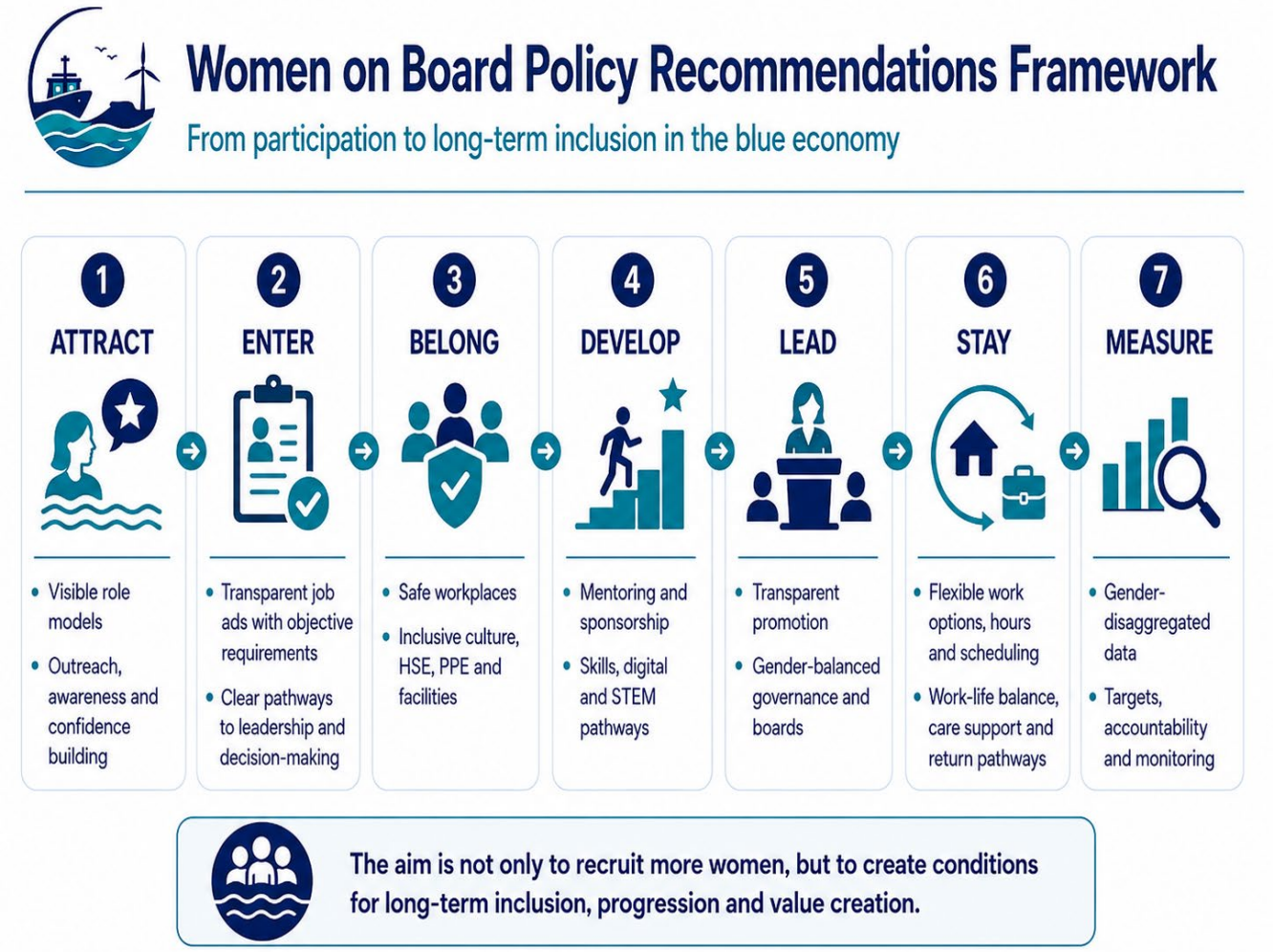

Figure 2: Women On Board Policy Recommendations Framework summary.

An inclusive blue economy is not created by asking women to adapt to systems built without them in mind. It is created by designing education, recruitment, workplaces and career and social structures so that different people can contribute, develop and create value throughout their working lives.

1. Introduction

The blue economy is a major source of employment and value creation in Europe, yet its workforce remains markedly gender imbalanced. The EU blue economy employed an estimated 4.88 million people and generated €263 billion in gross value added in 2023[1], while available European evidence indicates that women account for only around 29% of the blue-economy workforce and are often concentrated in lower-paid and lower-status positions.[2] The sector is also strategically important to the EU because it supports coastal and island communities and contributes to key priorities including food security, maritime transport, renewable energy, innovation, the green transition and economic resilience. This makes the effective use of available skills and talent particularly important. This matters not only as a question of equality, as Europe's future competitiveness also depends on creating labour markets and working conditions that enable people to enter, develop and remain in employment throughout different stages of life. The EU's gender equality framework recognises persistent inequalities in labour-market participation, representation across economic sectors and access to decision-making limit equal participation in society and the economy, while also emphasising the need to integrate gender equality across wider policy areas.[3]

Seven regional studies carried out in 2025-2026 through the Women on Board project examine women's participation across very different blue economy contexts, ranging from globally connected ports and maritime industries to aquaculture, fisheries, coastal tourism, research, offshore energy and inland blue value chains.

[1] https://setis.ec.europa.eu/eu-blue-economy-report-2025_en
[2] https://blue-economy-observatory.ec.europa.eu/women-blue-economy/driving-change/win-big-women-blue-economy-intelligence-gathering-and-capacity-boosting_en
[3] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

Together, they provide a broad evidence base for understanding how women enter, experience and progress within the sector. This synthesis report brings these findings together to identify recurring challenges, important regional differences and practical implications for policymakers and other actors responsible for regional development, employment, education, industry support, integration and equality.

1.1 Purpose of the synthesis

The report provides a comparative overview of women's participation and roles across the seven participating regions. It identifies recurring structural, cultural and organisational barriers that affect women's recruitment, retention and career progression, while also examining how these challenges vary according to sector structure, geography, labour-market conditions and the maturity of regional policy frameworks. The analysis further highlights opportunities emerging from the green and digital transitions, changing skills needs and the development of new blue-economy sectors. Based on these findings, the report translates the evidence into a concise and implementation-oriented policy framework intended to support practical action by policymakers and other relevant stakeholders.

1.2 A workforce and value-creation perspective

Gender equality is a goal in its own right, but the regional evidence shows that inclusion is also inseparable from workforce sustainability. Many blue-economy sectors depend on specialist skills, experience and continuity while simultaneously facing labour shortages and changing competence needs. Policies that widen access, improve retention and enable progression can therefore strengthen both social inclusion and regional competitiveness.

The synthesis asks a practical question: where are people being excluded or lost - before entry, at recruitment, in everyday work, during career progression, or when life circumstances change?

2. Evidence Base and Methodological Approach

The synthesis is based on seven regional mapping reports developed within the Women on Board project. In the project framework, these reports were produced under Deliverable A1.2 and constitute the evidence base for Deliverable A2.3, i.e. this synthesis report. The reports differ significantly in scope, methodology and data availability. Some combine primary survey and interview data with literature and policy analysis; others rely more heavily on administrative statistics, national studies, stakeholder workshops or sector-specific evidence. These differences are analytically useful, but they also require caution.

Region	Blue-economy context	Main evidence used in the regional mapping
Trøndelag, Norway	Aquaculture, fisheries, maritime industries, suppliers, marine technology, ports, R&D	Mixed-methods: literature and policy review, 134-response survey, 10 interviews and supplementary apprentice input.
Antwerp, Belgium	Port, logistics, shipping, industry, energy and maritime services	Administrative labour-market data, vacancy analysis, prior studies, interviews and employer evidence.
Brest / Brittany, France	Broad maritime economy including fisheries, transport, shipbuilding, research and coastal activities	National, regional and local statistics, policy review and mapping of existing initiatives.
Weser-Ems, Germany	Shipping, shipbuilding, ports, suppliers, offshore wind, logistics, education and research	Regional statistics, national maritime data, literature and regional stakeholder workshop.
Larnaca and Famagusta, Cyprus	Shipping, maritime transport, tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, innovation and emerging blue sectors	Sector analysis and a 2025 national mapping study combining survey-based and qualitative evidence.
Western Greece, Greece	Shipping, coastal tourism, aquaculture, fisheries, ports and emerging blue industries	National and regional data, institutional reports, literature and sector-specific evidence.
Iași, Romania	Aquaculture and related inland blue-economy value chains	Policy and sector analysis, national and regional statistics and local aquaculture examples.

2.1 How the reports are compared

The synthesis does not aggregate percentages across regions into a single European estimate, as the underlying datasets, populations and methods are not directly comparable. Instead, it applies a thematic comparative approach. Quantitative figures are used as regional illustrations rather than pooled statistics, while qualitative findings help explain mechanisms that may not be visible in headline participation data. A finding is treated as cross-regional where similar patterns or mechanisms appear independently in several regional reports. At the same time, regional differences are retained as relevant evidence where they reflect distinct economic structures, geographies, labour-market conditions or evidence bases, rather than being treated as inconsistencies to be averaged away. Policy recommendations are prioritised where they respond to recurring barriers and can be adapted to different regional contexts.

2.2 Data limitations are themselves a finding

Several regional reports point to incomplete or inconsistent gender-disaggregated data, particularly for sub-sectors, occupational roles, career trajectories, pay, leadership and local labour markets. The lack of comparable data limits the ability of policymakers to identify where exclusion occurs and to assess whether interventions are effective. Improving data collection and monitoring is therefore necessary both to target measures more effectively and to track whether they lead to meaningful change over time.

3. Women in the Blue Economy: A Diverse but Unequal Workforce

The seven regions demonstrate the diversity of the blue economy. They also reveal a remarkably consistent pattern of occupational segregation. Women are present across the sector, including in leadership, research, management, administration, tourism, aquaculture, ports and maritime services. Yet women's representation remains substantially lower in many technical, operational, sea-based and senior decision-making roles.

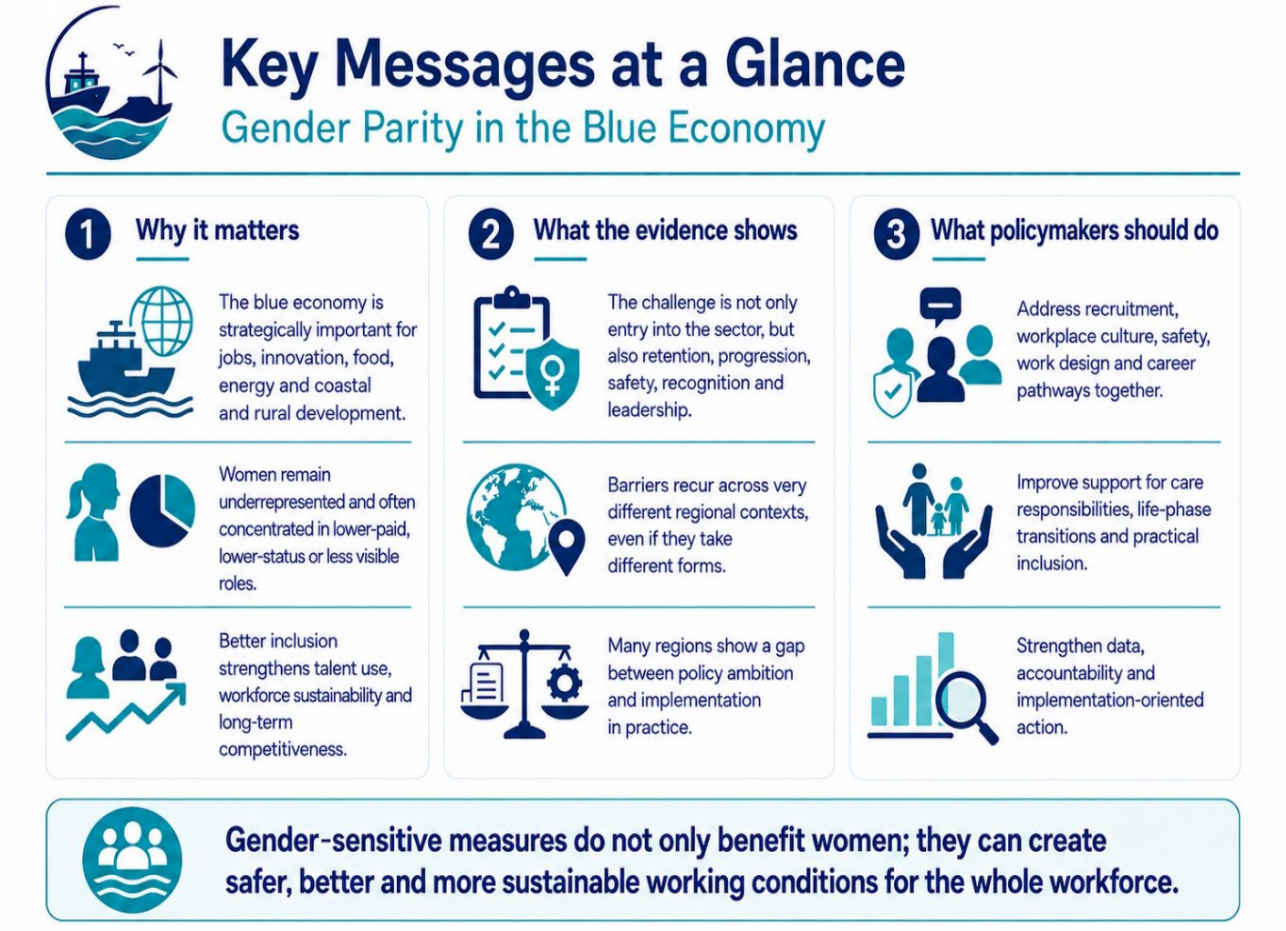

Figure 3: Key Messages at a Glance.

3.1 Horizontal segregation: where women work

Across the regional reports, women are more visible in administration, support, tourism, legal and professional services, research and selected parts of processing and quality-related work. In contrast, shipping operations, sea-going occupations, port operations, shipbuilding, some engineering roles, fisheries and other traditionally male-coded occupations remain less balanced.

The pattern appears in structurally different regions, although important exceptions and variations exist. Antwerp finds women concentrated mainly in administrative, service and support roles within a highly male-dominated port labour market. Cyprus and Western Greece identify similar separation between service-oriented and shore-based roles on the one hand and technical, operational and senior roles on the other. Greece nevertheless stands out for its comparatively high female participation in seafaring: women accounted for 7.8% of registered seafarers in 2024, substantially above the international and European reference levels cited in the regional report. At the same time, women remain far less represented in senior officer, engineering and command positions, illustrating that increased entry into a traditionally male-dominated occupation does not necessarily translate into equal career progression.

In Weser-Ems, women's representation has increased in the maritime workforce overall, while operational service at sea remains extremely male-dominated. Trøndelag likewise finds women present across a broad range of roles but unevenly distributed, with technical, operational and sea-based functions remaining less balanced.

3.2 Vertical segregation: who progesses and leads

Across the seven regional mappings, women remain unevenly represented across occupational levels and functions, with recurring underrepresentation in technical, operational, senior and decision-making roles. Several reports explicitly describe both

horizontal and vertical segregation, while others document the same underlying pattern through differences in occupational distribution, leadership representation or access to career progression. Common barriers include opaque or informal career pathways, weaker access to networks, mentoring and training, and gendered assumptions about competence and authority.

More balanced representation may also affect how teams and organisations function. Research on gender-diverse teams indicates that the benefits of positive diversity dynamics are stronger as team composition moves closer to numerical gender balance, suggesting that representation needs to be sufficiently balanced for different perspectives to meaningfully influence group behaviour and performance. This is particularly relevant in traditionally male-dominated sectors, where the presence of only a small minority of women may increase representation without substantially changing established organisational norms.[4] Wider research likewise finds that more gender-balanced teams can be associated with stronger collective outcomes; for example, a large-scale study of 6.6 million scientific publications found that increasingly gender-balanced teams produced more novel and higher-impact research than same-gender teams of comparable size.[5]

At the same time, the transformation of blue-economy work creates new opportunities to address gender imbalances. Several regions identify a growing need to strengthen women's pathways into STEM, technical and leadership roles, while digitalisation, IT, automation and the green transition are creating new skill requirements and occupational pathways across maritime industries, ports, aquaculture, energy and related sectors.

[4] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/emre.12164
[5] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36037387/

3.3 Invisible and unpaid work in family-based blue-economy activities

In some parts of the blue economy, particularly fisheries, aquaculture and family-owned businesses, women's economic contribution is not always fully reflected in employment statistics. Regional evidence from Cyprus and Western Greece points to women supporting family enterprises through administrative, organisational, processing and other forms of work that may be informal, unpaid or insufficiently recognised.

This form of invisible labour complicates assessments of women's participation in the blue economy. A woman may contribute substantially to the operation and viability of a family business while remaining absent from formal workforce, ownership or leadership statistics. The issue is therefore not only one of representation, but also of recognition, economic status and access to the rights, resources and decision-making opportunities associated with formal participation. Better recognition of such work requires data collection that captures contributions across the wider value chain, including unpaid and informal roles, as well as policy attention to formalisation, social protection, ownership, access to finance and participation in business decision-making.

3.4 Employment quality and exposure to sectoral vulnerability

Representation alone does not capture the quality or security of women's participation. In some regions, women are concentrated in seasonal, lower-paid, informal or less secure roles, particularly in tourism, processing and support functions. This can make them more exposed to economic shocks, market fluctuations and environmental pressures affecting blue-economy sectors. The regional evidence from Cyprus and Western Greece is particularly relevant in this regard, showing how occupational segregation can also produce unequal exposure to instability and weaker long-term career prospects.

3.5 Progress is real, but uneven

The synthesis should not be read as evidence of universal stagnation. Several regions report positive movement. Greece, for example, documents strong recent growth in registered female seafarers, although senior officer, engineering and command positions remain less balanced. France and Brittany highlight active efforts to increase women's visibility and diversify maritime professions. Norway has strong female participation in leadership and board-member positions compared to global averages. Digitalisation, sustainability and emerging blue industries are also creating new occupational pathways in several regions.

The regional evidence shows progress in participation, but the deeper challenge is whether that progress reaches technical roles, secure employment, leadership, authority and long-term career sustainability.

4. What the seven regions have in common

4.1 Entry: gendered expectations shape the pipeline

Gendered occupational expectations begin before recruitment. Across the reports, stereotypes about physical work, safety, life at sea, technical ability and male-dominated workplaces shape educational choices and occupational aspirations. A narrow public image of the blue economy can prevent women and girls from seeing the full diversity of available careers.

Antwerp highlights the persistent image of port work as heavy, harsh and male. Several reports identifies family and social discouragement from maritime careers, including safety concerns and misconceptions. Weser-Ems points to gendered socialisation and the way technology is presented in education. These mechanisms reduce the talent pipeline long before an employer posts a vacancy.

Policy implication: career information must reflect the actual diversity of modern blue-economy work, and outreach should start early enough to influence education and training choices.

4.2 Recruitment: equal access requires more than open vacancies

The evidence suggests that women's lower representation cannot be explained solely by qualifications or interest. Recruitment communication, informal networks, job requirements, mobility constraints and organisational reputation all shape who applies and who enters. Antwerp's evidence is especially clear that unexplained gender gaps remain even after observable characteristics are considered, pointing to the influence of recruitment norms and workplace culture.

Transparent, competency-based recruitment, inclusive job descriptions, broader outreach and review of unnecessary entry requirements can improve access while maintaining professional standards.

4.3 Belonging: workplace culture can include and exclude at the same time

A strong cross-regional finding is the difference between formal inclusion and lived inclusion. Workplaces may report positive wellbeing, equal-opportunity policies and supportive colleagues while gendered barriers persist through humour, informal hierarchies, exclusion from networks, biased assumptions about competence or tolerance of unwanted behaviour.

The Trøndelag mapping illustrates this tension particularly clearly: positive assessments of the sector coexist with reports of unwanted situations and unequal opportunity. Cyprus and Western Greece likewise describe underreporting of discrimination and harassment due to

weak reporting mechanisms and fears of retaliation, and the persistence of informal gender norms in male-dominated environments.

> **Formal equality is not sufficient evidence of inclusion. Policymakers and employers need to examine how opportunity, recognition, safety and authority are experienced in everyday working life.**

4.4 Development: informal career systems reproduce inequality

Mentoring, sponsorship, professional networks and access to training recur across the reports as important enabling factors. Where these systems are informal, access tends to depend more heavily on existing relationships and visibility. This can disadvantage workers who are underrepresented in the dominant occupational or leadership culture.

The regional evidence supports structured mentoring, transparent promotion criteria, equal access to competence development and active career planning. These measures are particularly relevant in technical and operational sectors where women remain few and where progression pathways may be less visible.

4.5 Retention: work-life balance, workplace design and safety are structural labour-market issues

Long working hours, shift systems, time away from home, unpredictable schedules and demanding operational conditions are repeatedly identified across the regional reports as factors affecting retention and career progression. These conditions can affect all workers, but their consequences are not always gender-neutral. Women still carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care and household responsibilities in many contexts, which can make rigid working arrangements, irregular hours and expectations of continuous availability more difficult to combine with different stages of life.

The same principle applies to the physical organisation of work. Workplaces, equipment, protective clothing, tools, facilities and safety routines have often been developed around a traditionally male workforce. Where these systems do not account for differences in body size, fit, physical ergonomics or practical needs, women may face additional barriers in their everyday working environment. This can affect not only comfort, but also safety, performance, belonging and long-term willingness to remain in the sector.

Cyprus provides detailed evidence of fatigue, time pressure and difficulties combining work with family responsibilities, even where flexible arrangements are formally available. Western Greece identifies similar challenges in maritime and coastal sectors, while Trøndelag highlights the importance of practical facilitation, appropriate workwear, inclusive workplace conditions and adaptation across different life phases. Together, these findings suggest that work-life balance, health and safety, and workplace design should not be treated as individual coping issues, but as part of how work is structured.

The need to redesign demanding work should also be understood as a wider workforce issue rather than solely as a measure to accommodate women. Physically demanding and operational occupations can carry significant risks of injury, long-term absence and reduced work ability for workers of all genders. EU statistics show particularly high rates of serious workplace accidents in sectors such as transport, manufacturing, construction and agriculture, forestry and fishing, all of which share characteristics with parts of the blue economy. Improving ergonomics, equipment, automation, work organisation and preventive health and safety can therefore reduce unnecessary physical strain and occupational risk for existing male-dominated workforces while simultaneously making these occupations more accessible to a broader range of workers while maintaining workforce, efficiency sustainability and health.[6]

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20260428-1

Measures intended to address these barriers should not be understood as disadvantaging men. More predictable schedules, better-designed equipment, safer workplaces, improved parental and care arrangements, appropriate facilities and greater flexibility can improve working conditions for the entire workforce, including strains on private life. They can also make it easier for men to take a greater role in caregiving and allow workers of all genders to remain in employment through changing life circumstances, including parenthood, illness, caring responsibilities and later career stages.

Gender balance may also have implications for workplace safety itself. Recent research examining workforce gender composition found that firms with more gender-diverse workforces experienced fewer time-loss injuries, with the authors linking this relationship partly to safer and more inclusive organisational climates. Research on board composition has similarly found that gender-diverse boards are more likely to adopt employee health and safety policies. These findings suggest that bringing a wider range of experiences into both everyday work and organisational decision-making may contribute to identifying risks and designing safer working environments.[7]

Policy implication: workforce policy should include the review of shift design, predictability, leave arrangements, childcare and care support, travel requirements, return-from-leave pathways, personal protective equipment, tools, facilities and other aspects of workplace design. The objective should be to create working conditions that are safe, practical and sustainable for a more diverse workforce across different life phases.

[7] https://www.sciencedirect.com/org/science/article/abs/pii/S0144357725000696

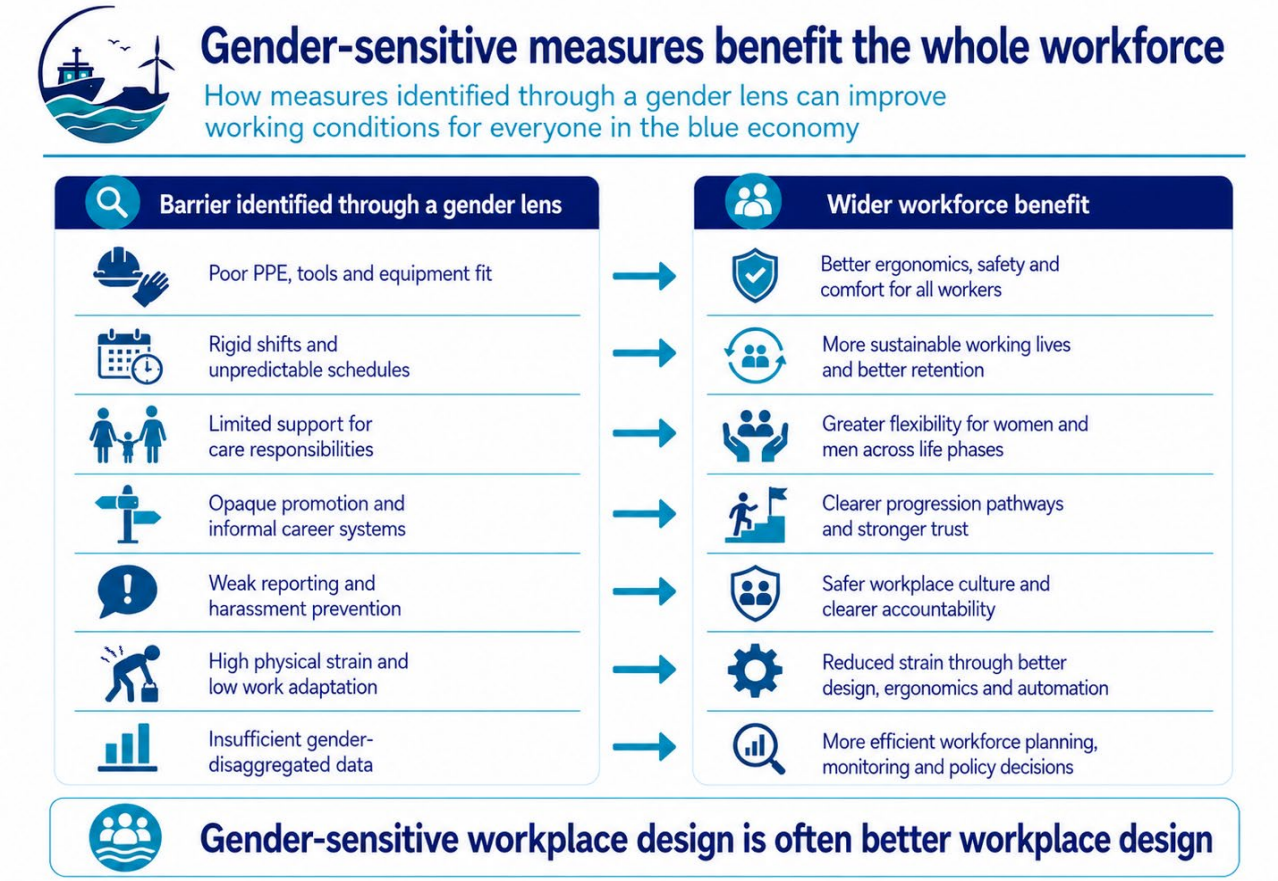

Figure 4: Gender-sensitive measures benefit the whole workforce.

4.6 Leadership: authority and recognition remain uneven

Women's underrepresentation in leadership is both an outcome of earlier barriers and a mechanism that can reinforce them. Visible women in decision-making positions can broaden perceptions of who belongs, improve access to role models and influence organisational priorities. However, the reports also caution that numerical representation alone does not guarantee equal authority or recognition. Transparent selection and promotion, leadership development, mentoring and accountability for succession planning can help move from individual success stories to more systematic inclusion.

The case for more balanced representation in leadership is not limited to representation itself. A broader range of experiences at decision-making level can influence which risks, needs and workplace conditions receive attention. Emerging research indicates, for example, an association between greater gender diversity on corporate boards and stronger adoption of employee health and safety policies. This suggests that more diverse decision-making structures may contribute to broader consideration of employee needs and working conditions.[8]

4.7 Policy: the implementation gap is now a central challenge

Across several regions, gender equality already appears in national, regional or EU-aligned policy frameworks. Yet implementation is often fragmented. Strategies may support recruitment, skills, innovation or equality without clearly connecting these goals to operational responsibilities, funding criteria, workplace practice or measurable indicators.

Cyprus explicitly identifiies a systemic gap between policy commitments and organisational implementation. Weser-Ems shows that skilled-worker policies can remain gender-neutral in ways that leave specific barriers unaddressed. Trøndelag demonstrates how equality, inclusion and recruitment can be linked to regional value creation, while also showing that policy ambition does not automatically change everyday working conditions.

> **The policy gap is increasingly not a lack of commitment to equality. It is a gap between commitment and implementation.**

[8] https://www.sciencedirect.com/org/science/article/abs/pii/S2040826925000226

5. What differs between the regions

The common findings should not obscure major regional differences. The same structural mechanism can appear very differently depending on the dominant industries, labour-market structure, geography and maturity of the regional policy system.

Dimension	Why it matters for policy
Economic structure	Antwerp is shaped by a large port-industrial labour market; Trøndelag by aquaculture, fisheries, marine suppliers and research; Weser-Ems by shipping, shipbuilding, offshore wind and maritime services; Cyprus and Western Greece by combinations of shipping, tourism, fisheries and emerging sectors; Brest/Brittany by a broad maritime economy; and Iași by aquaculture and inland blue value chains.
Type of work	The barriers facing a seafarer differ from those facing an aquaculture worker, port employee, researcher, tourism entrepreneur or office-based maritime professional. Policy therefore needs both cross-cutting measures and sector-specific adaptation.
Geography and infrastructure	Island, rural, peripheral and coastal areas may face additional constraints related to childcare, transport, training access, mobility and smaller professional networks. In port regions, transport and distance-to-work barriers can also be decisive.
Stage of labour-market integration	Some regions report growth in women's participation while others remain highly segregated. Positive entry trends do not necessarily translate into balanced seniority, technical representation or leadership.
Data maturity	Some reports include substantial primary evidence, while others rely more heavily on national data because regional or sector-specific statistics are unavailable. This affects how precisely local policy can be targeted.
Policy maturity	Some regions already have explicit equality objectives in blue-economy or workforce strategies, while others have broader gender-neutral policies. The key issue is whether existing instruments can be adapted to address documented barriers.

The common patterns identified across the seven regions should not obscure important differences. Greece stands out for comparatively high female participation in seafaring, although women remain underrepresented in senior maritime positions. Trøndelag shows relatively strong female representation in leadership compared with several other regions, while still documenting gendered barriers in everyday working life. Antwerp highlights practical mobility and transport barriers specific to a large port-industrial labour market, while Iași reflects a very different inland aquaculture context with limited sector-specific gender data. These differences demonstrate that similar structural challenges can take different forms depending on sector structure, geography and labour-market organisation.

5.1 A practical principle for transfer

Policy measures should therefore be transferred by function, not copied mechanically. For example, the transferable principle may be “make progression transparent”, while the actual intervention could be a formal promotion framework in a large port company, a mentoring network in a fragmented fisheries sector, or structured career planning in an aquaculture cluster.

6. Where change is already happening

The regional reports identify significant opportunities. The green and digital transitions are changing job content and creating new roles in automation, digital logistics, marine technology, offshore renewables, environmental monitoring, blue biotechnology, sustainable aquaculture, research and circular business models. These shifts can widen entry points, but only if education, recruitment and progression systems are intentionally inclusive.

Opportunity	Policy relevance
Green and digital transitions	New occupations can weaken some traditional physical and occupational barriers, while creating demand for new technical, analytical and interdisciplinary skills.
Skills shortages	Recruitment pressure creates a strong economic incentive to widen the talent pool and retain qualified workers who might otherwise leave.
Education-industry cooperation	Partnerships between schools, vocational education, universities and employers can make blue careers more visible and align training with emerging skills needs.
Role models and networks	Visible women, peer networks, mentoring and expert databases can change perceptions, strengthen confidence and improve access to informal knowledge and opportunities.
Entrepreneurship	Sustainable tourism, value-added seafood, blue technology, research-driven innovation and circular bioeconomy create new pathways for women as business owners and founders.
Existing policy frameworks	Many regions already have relevant strategies for skills, equality, innovation or blue growth. The opportunity is to make implementation more targeted, measurable and connected across policy areas.

7. From evidence to policy improvement

The Women on Board project seeks to improve seven policy instruments across the participating regions. The findings presented in this report provide the evidence base for that process and support policymakers in identifying areas where existing measures, programmes and governance mechanisms can be strengthened to promote greater gender equality in the blue economy labour market.

The common barriers identified across the seven regions, including occupational segregation, limited progression opportunities, workplace culture challenges, work-life balance constraints and insufficient gender-disaggregated data, highlight areas where policy intervention can contribute to more inclusive and effective labour market outcomes.

The Women on Board Policy Recommendations Framework for an Inclusive Blue Economy is intended to support:

- Policy reviews and updates.
- Design of new measures and support schemes.
- Stakeholder dialogue and co-creation processes.
- Good practice transfer between regions.
- Monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes.
- Integration of gender equality objectives into blue economy strategies and programmes.

Finding	Implication
Entry is gendered	Improve career guidance, outreach and STEM promotion
Segregation persists	Increase support for women in technical and operational occupations
Progression gap	Strengthen mentoring, leadership and training measures
Retention challenges	Promote flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies
Lived inclusion issues	Improve workplace standards and reporting mechanisms
Implementation gap	Introduce indicators, monitoring and accountability
Data gaps	Improve gender-disaggregated data collection

8. From findings to action: A policy framework for an inclusive Blue Economy

The evidence suggests that policy should follow the employment journey rather than treating gender inclusion as a standalone programme. The framework below is designed as a practical reference for policymakers, industry organisations, employers, education providers and regional support actors.

8.1 ATTRACT

Make blue careers visible, credible and accessible to a broader range of people.

- Present the full diversity of blue-economy occupations, not only traditional frontline roles.
- Use visible women and real career stories in schools, vocational guidance and public communication.
- Start outreach early enough to influence educational choices, including STEM and vocational pathways.
- Engage families, teachers and career advisers where stereotypes or safety and ability misconceptions shape choices.

8.2 ENTER

Remove unnecessary barriers and bias from education, recruitment and first-entry pathways.

- Use transparent, competency-based recruitment criteria and review job requirements that may be unnecessarily exclusionary.
- Use objective wording rather than subjective wording to describe vacancies and in operational management.
- Broaden recruitment channels beyond informal networks and existing male-dominated pipelines.

- Review recruitment language and employer branding for signals about who is expected to belong.
- Address practical entry barriers such as transport, equipment, facilities, support systems, certification and access to training.

8.3 BELONG

Ensure safe, respectful workplaces with practical conditions that enable full participation.

- Treat workplace culture, safety and inclusion as core workforce conditions that are top-down lead through example, not as communication topics or left to informal implementation.
- Establish trusted, visible and accountable procedures for reporting discrimination, harassment and unwanted situations.
- Ensure equipment, workwear, changing facilities and practical arrangements are suitable for the actual workforce.
- Train managers to recognise informal exclusion, biased evaluation and unequal standards of recognition.

8.4 DEVELOP

Provide transparent access to training, mentoring, networks and career development.

- Make promotion criteria and career pathways explicit.
- Provide structured access to mentoring, sponsorship, networks and competence development.
- Track participation in training and progression by gender and occupational group.
- Support career development before, during and after parental or other care-related leave.

8.5 LEAD

Make routes into leadership and decision-making visible, fair and accountable.

- Set clear expectations for balanced succession pipelines and transparent leadership recruitment.
- Invest in leadership development and sponsorship for underrepresented talent.
- Ensure selection panels and decision processes are structured and evidence-based.
- Monitor not only representation in leadership, but retention, authority, pay and progression into decision-making roles.

8.6 STAY

Design work so that people can remain and progress through different life stages.

- Analyse who leaves the sector, at what career stage and for what reasons.
- Improve predictability and flexibility where operationally possible, including shift planning and return-to-work arrangements.
- Treat childcare, travel, care responsibilities and life-phase adaptation as workforce infrastructure issues.
- Design measures that improve conditions broadly while responding to barriers that affect women disproportionately.

8.7 MEASURE

Use gender-disaggregated data, clear responsibilities and measurable indicators to track results.

- Define a small set of gender-disaggregated indicators linked to recruitment, retention, progression, leadership, pay and workplace experience.

- Assign responsibility for implementation and reporting.
- Include equality and inclusion criteria in relevant funding, procurement, programme and partnership mechanisms where appropriate.
- Evaluate interventions and stop relying on activity counts alone; measure whether outcomes change.

8.8 A concise policy checklist

Policy area	Question for decision-makers	Suggested evidence
Recruitment	Do outreach and job design broaden the applicant pool? Do vacancy texts and operational management use objective or subjective wording?	Applications, hires and conversion rates by gender and role. Vacancy texts and operational management that use objective wording.
Retention	Do working conditions allow people to stay across life stages?	Turnover, absence, exit reasons and return after leave.
Progression	Are pathways visible and access to development equitable?	Promotion rates, training access, mentoring participation.
Leadership	Are women reaching positions of authority and influence?	Representation by level, succession pools, pay and tenure.
Culture and safety	Can employees report problems without negative consequences?	Workplace experience surveys, reporting patterns, resolution.
Education pipeline	Are girls and women entering relevant study and training pathways?	Enrolment, completion and transition into blue-economy work.
Policy implementation	Is someone accountable for delivery?	Named responsibility, budget, milestones and outcome indicators.

9. Recommendations by actor

9.1 Regional and national policymakers

- Integrate gender inclusion into mainstream blue-economy, skills, innovation and regional-development policy rather than isolating it in separate equality actions.
- Convert strategic commitments into funded measures, responsibilities, indicators and reporting requirements.
- Use public funding and programmes to support transparent recruitment, competence development, inclusive work organisation and stronger regional data.
- Address infrastructure constraints - including transport, childcare and training access - where they limit participation in specific regions or sectors.
- Create mechanisms for policy learning across employers, education providers, industry networks and public authorities.

9.2 Employers and industry organisations

- Use objective wording rather than subjective wording to describe vacancies and in operational management.
- Audit recruitment, promotion, work organisation and workplace culture using both workforce data and employee experience.
- Formalise mentoring, sponsorship and career development instead of relying only on informal networks.
- Make reporting mechanisms for discrimination and harassment credible, safe and visible.
- Adapt equipment, facilities and practical conditions to a diverse workforce.
- Treat retention and progression as seriously as recruitment.

9.3 Education, training and research actors

- Show the full range of blue-economy careers and challenge stereotypes early, including fostering confidence in all genders.
- Strengthen pathways between education, apprenticeships, industry and emerging blue-economy occupations.
- Monitor gender differences in enrolment, completion and transition into employment.
- Support networks, mentoring and exposure to women working in technical and leadership roles.
- Contribute to consistent regional evidence and evaluation of interventions.

9.4 Networks and support organisations

- Connect existing women's networks rather than creating fragmented parallel initiatives.
- Create visible pathways to mentors, experts, employers and funding.
- Share practical workplace and policy examples that have demonstrably improved inclusion.
- Act as intermediaries between individual experiences and policy change, especially in fragmented sectors and rural or coastal regions.

10. Conclusion

The seven regional mappings show that women's integration in the blue economy is advancing, but unevenly. Women are present across sectors and occupations, yet many remain concentrated in particular roles and face continuing barriers to technical work, leadership, recognition, safety and long-term career progression. The precise form of these barriers differs across regions, but the mechanisms recur often enough to justify coordinated action.

The central lesson is that numerical participation is only the beginning. A truly inclusive blue economy depends on how work is organised, how competence is recognised, how progression happens, whether people feel safe and respected, and whether careers can remain sustainable across different life stages.

For policymakers, this shifts the focus from isolated initiatives to implementation. The task is to connect equality with recruitment, skills, innovation, workforce planning and regional value creation; to define responsibility; and to measure whether outcomes change. For employers and sector organisations, it means treating inclusion as part of everyday organisational quality. For education and support systems, it means widening access to the careers, networks and opportunities through which future value will be created.

> **The goal is not simply more women in the blue economy. The goal is a blue economy that makes better use of all available competence - and gives people opportunities to enter, contribute, develop and lead.**

Annexes: Regional Reports

The following seven regional reports form the primary evidence base for this synthesis report and are attached as supporting documents:

Annex #	Region	Regional report	Prepared by
Annex i	Trøndelag, Norway	Mapping Women's Integration in the Blue Economy - Regional Report Trøndelag, Norway (2026)	Blue Center of Competence
Annex ii	Antwerp, Belgium	Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy - PP02 Autonomous Provincial Company Port Center	Autonomous Provincial Company Port Center / Havenwereld, Province of Antwerp
Annex iii	Brest / Brittany, France	Activity 1.2: Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy Across Participating Regions	Brest Métropole
Annex iv	Weser-Ems, Germany	Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy Across Participating Regions - Weser-Ems	MARIKO
Annex v	Larnaca and Famagusta, Cyprus	Activity 1.2: Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy in Cyprus	Larnaca and Famagusta Districts Development Agency
Annex vi	Western Greece, Greece	Activity 1.2: Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy in the Region of Western Greece	Region of Western Greece
Annex vii	Iași, Romania	Activity 1.2: Mapping of Women's Integration in the Blue Economy Across Participating Regions - Iași	Municipality of Iași

The full regional reports are available on the Women on Board project website:

https://www.interregeurope.eu/women-on-board/library

www.interregeurope.eu/women-on-board

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