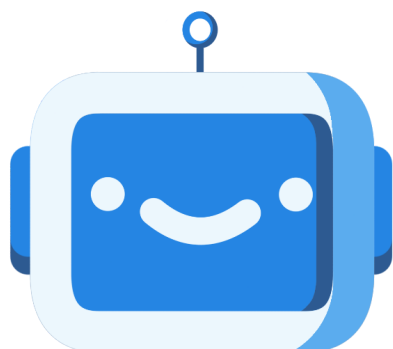
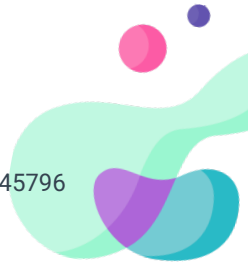
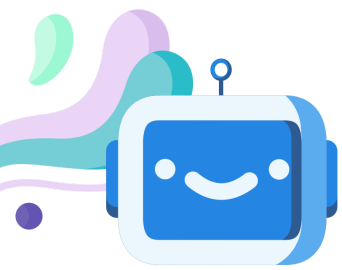




Co-funded by
the European Union



Bots4Business



Executive Summary

Policy and Practice Recommendations Report Bots4Business (B4B)

Purpose: to convert evidence from national desk research and focus groups in Austria, Croatia, France, Ireland, Italy and Spain into a concise implementation and policy agenda for responsible AI uptake in VET and SMEs.

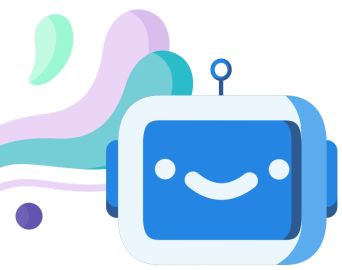
Headline conclusion

AI awareness is increasing across all six countries, but adoption remains uneven, fragmented and concentrated in better-resourced organisations. The main constraint is not access to tools alone. SMEs and VET professionals need practical competence, trusted guidance, time, mentoring, clear governance and locally accessible support structures.

The recommended direction

- Build role-based AI competence for VET professionals and SME leaders.
- Start with bounded business or learning problems and learn through guided practice.
- Translate responsible-AI requirements into clear operational procedures.
- Connect VET providers, SMEs and regional innovation actors through durable cooperation.
- Target micro-enterprises, rural areas and less digitally mature sectors explicitly.
- Monitor application and outcomes—not participation alone—and maintain open resources over time.

Evidence base: six national desk research reports and six national focus group reports produced under B4B WP5 Task 2 (2026).



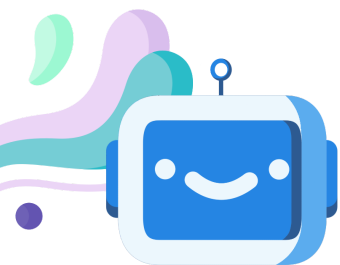
1. Evidence base and comparative national findings

The synthesis used a structured thematic comparison of national evidence. It examined AI adoption and maturity, skills and continuing professional development, the role of VET, responsible-AI barriers, VET–SME cooperation, inclusion, policy support and sustainability. Findings were compared across sources; recurring themes were treated as cross-country priorities, while national differences were retained for adaptation.

Country	Key evidence and national emphasis	Priority implication
Austria	Strong support infrastructure and mature digital-policy context, but smaller firms and trainers still require practical pathways and protected learning time.	Connect existing structures to short diagnostics, trainer CPD and regional SME support.
Croatia	Uneven readiness, limited specialist capacity and regional disparities increase dependence on accessible guidance and external support.	Use local intermediaries, mentoring and inclusive funding for micro and rural firms.
France	A developed innovation ecosystem coexists with skills gaps, fragmented access and concern about dependency, cost and responsible use.	Provide tool-neutral training, governance guidance and sustainable local support.
Ireland	Active digital and enterprise-support landscape, but VET capacity, time constraints and the move from experimentation to implementation remain challenges.	Link VET, enterprise agencies and SMEs through practical pilots and recognised CPD.
Italy	Adoption is concentrated in larger and more digitally mature firms; territorial disparities and low AI familiarity remain significant.	Prioritise micro-enterprises, southern/rural contexts, trainer capacity and plain-language compliance.
Spain	Growing adoption and policy attention, combined with strong differences by firm size, sector and territory.	Use sector-based learning, regional cooperation and sustained access to project resources.

Shared pattern

Across the six countries, AI use is more common for generic tasks—content drafting, communication, translation, research and basic automation—than for integrated operational processes. Awareness therefore should not be confused with organisational readiness. Micro-enterprises face the greatest combination of cost, time, skills, data and advisory constraints.



Common gaps requiring action

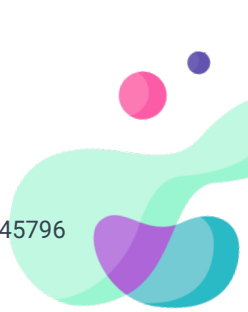
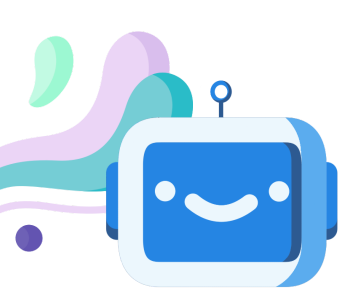
- No consistent AI competence baseline for VET professionals or SME users.
- Limited time and protected capacity for continuing professional development.
- Uncertainty about data protection, reliability, intellectual property, accountability and the AI Act.
- Fragmented information, funding and referral pathways, especially for the smallest firms.
- Weakly institutionalised cooperation between VET providers and SMEs on AI adoption.
- Risk that regional, sectoral and firm-size gaps will widen without targeted intervention.

2. Focus group findings and stakeholder priorities

The focus groups confirm the desk research and add an implementation perspective. Participants described AI adoption as exploratory and task-level rather than strategic. They asked for support that begins with a concrete organisational problem, produces an immediately usable output and remains available after the initial training event.

What stakeholders need

Theme	Stakeholder message	Delivery response
Learning design	Long, abstract or highly technical courses do not fit SME realities.	Short modular units, realistic cases, live practice and blended support.
Competence	Users need literacy, prompting, critical evaluation, process mapping and change skills.	Role-based pathways with evidence of application and recognised learning.
Trust and risk	Confidentiality, unreliable outputs and unclear responsibility inhibit adoption.	Practical safe-use rules, human oversight, verification and referral routes.
Implementation	Training alone does not solve organisation-specific barriers.	Diagnostics, learning sprints, mentoring, clinics and reviewed pilots.
Communication	Generic information and complex applications exclude smaller firms.	Plain-language offers through trusted local intermediaries.
Sustainability	One-off resources quickly become obsolete and communities disappear.	Named ownership, open materials, update cycles and continuing networks.



The evolving role of VET

VET providers can act as trusted learning and innovation intermediaries: diagnosing needs, translating technology into practice, facilitating safe experimentation and connecting firms to specialist support. This role does not require every trainer to become an AI developer or legal adviser. It requires updated competence, practical resources, clear boundaries and reliable escalation pathways.

Preferred learning model

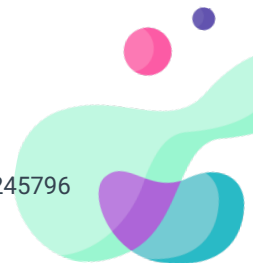
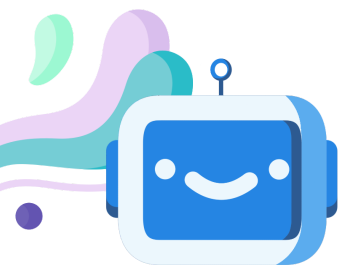
- A short readiness conversation to identify one bounded, relevant use case.
- Concise preparation covering capabilities, limitations, data and oversight.
- A hands-on sprint using a realistic SME or VET task.
- Mentoring or a clinic to adapt the method to the organisation.
- A documented action plan, acceptable-use rules and review decision.
- Continued access to peers, current resources and specialist referrals.

Comparative conclusion: Although national systems differ, stakeholder demand converges around practical, supported, responsible and locally accessible adoption rather than stand-alone technology training.

3. Practice-level recommendations

The letter P identifies a Practice-level Recommendation: an operational action for B4B partners, VET providers, trainers, SMEs and business-support organisations. The ten recommendations form a connected pathway from readiness to implementation and sustainability.

Code	Practice recommendation	Minimum practical output
P1	Introduce an SME AI readiness and use-case scan.	Baseline, priority use case, risk screen and learning plan.
P2	Deliver role-based AI CPD for VET professionals.	Assessed learning for learner, facilitator and leader roles.
P3	Create protected train-the-trainer capacity.	Release time, co-facilitation and recurring peer clinics.
P4	Run short SME AI learning sprints.	A tested workflow, evidence and decision to stop, adapt or scale.
P5	Build a sector-based use-case and learning library.	Reviewed cases showing task, value, risks and human controls.

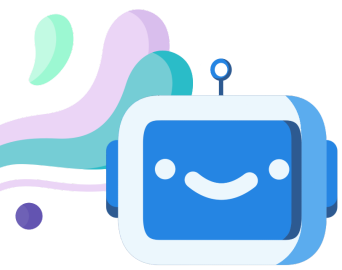


Code	Practice recommendation	Minimum practical output
P6	Provide a responsible-AI starter pack.	Plain-language rules, checklists and specialist referral routes.
P7	Establish local AI clinics and mentoring.	Accessible troubleshooting and implementation support.
P8	Use VET–SME co-design labs and AI-focused work-based learning.	Real business challenges converted into supervised learning.
P9	Design access for micro-enterprises, rural areas and non-technical sectors.	Targeted outreach, flexible delivery and proportionate support.
P10	Maintain an open B4B community and resource update cycle.	Named owners, versions, review dates and an active network.

Implementation sequence

Stage	Action	Decision/evidence
Discover	Readiness and use-case scan	Is there a feasible, relevant and proportionate starting point?
Prepare	Role-based CPD and safe-use rules	Do participants have the competence and controls to proceed?
Experiment	Learning sprint and guided pilot	What works, what fails and what remains under human control?
Implement	Mentoring, clinic and referral	Who owns the workflow, support and escalation?
Review	Outcome and governance check	Stop, adapt or scale based on evidence.
Sustain	Recognition, community and updates	How will learning and resources remain current?

Practice principle: Begin with a business or learning problem—not a tool demonstration—and require every activity to produce usable evidence of application.



4. Policy-level recommendations

The letter R identifies a Policy-level Recommendation: a structural action for public authorities, qualification bodies, funders, social partners and institutions responsible for VET, skills, SME development and AI governance. Policy measures should enable and scale the practice pathway.

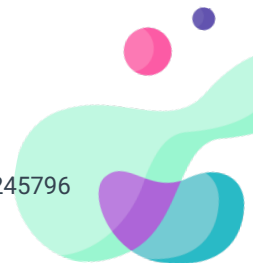
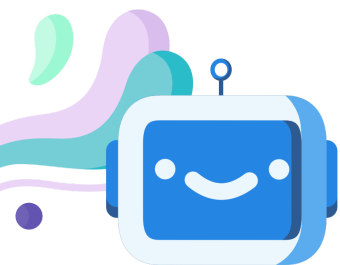
Code	Policy recommendation	Primary mechanisms
R1	Adopt a common AI competence framework for VET professionals.	EU-referenced roles, learning outcomes, assessment evidence and national mapping.
R2	Mainstream AI into VET curricula, qualifications and recognised CPD.	Cross-cutting outcomes, stackable micro-learning and quality assurance.
R3	Create an accessible AI skills and adoption funding package for SMEs.	Vouchers, diagnostics, mentoring, pilot support and simplified access.
R4	Institutionalise regional VET–SME–AI cooperation hubs.	Co-design labs, clinics, referrals and shared sector expertise.
R5	Translate the AI Act, GDPR and related rules into practical guidance.	Plain-language scenarios, templates, oversight and escalation routes.
R6	Establish common monitoring for AI skills and adoption maturity.	Shared definitions, disaggregated baselines and outcome indicators.
R7	Make territorial and social inclusion an explicit AI policy target.	Targeting by size, region, sector and digital maturity; accessible delivery.
R8	Fund open, sustainable and vendor-neutral learning infrastructure.	Open licences, maintenance ownership, update budgets and interoperability.

Responsibility and policy fit

EU action should provide common language, transferable resources and alignment with DigComp, DigCompEdu, micro-credentials and the AI Act. National authorities should embed competence and responsible use in qualifications, CPD and SME-support programmes. Regional and local actors should organise access, delivery and cooperation around sector and territorial needs. Social partners, VET providers and business organisations should validate relevance and return implementation barriers to policymakers.

Policy design principles

- Fund skills, organisational change and advisory support—not technology purchase alone.



- Use proportionality and plain language so governance requirements enable safe adoption.
- Recognise short, assessed learning while protecting quality and transferability.
- Disaggregate monitoring to reveal who is not being reached or supported effectively.
- Require ownership and maintenance plans for publicly funded learning resources.

Policy objective: Make responsible AI capability a normal, accessible and durable component of VET and SME support across Europe.

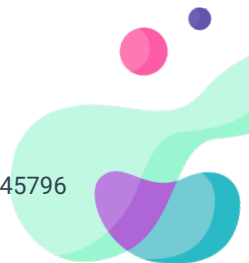
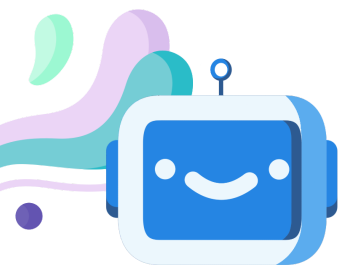
5. Roadmap, monitoring and final recommendations

Implementation should combine early common tools with country and sector adaptation. The roadmap below is deliberately staged so that partners can test assumptions, document results and embed only those components that demonstrate relevance, inclusion and responsible use.

Period	Priority actions	Expected result
0–6 months	Validate a competence model; prepare the readiness scan and responsible-AI starter pack; map referral partners; select inclusive sector pilots.	Common baseline, delivery tools, ownership and pilot criteria.
6–18 months	Pilot trainer CPD, SME learning sprints, mentoring, regional clinics and co-design labs; collect implementation evidence.	Tested practice model, documented cases and improvement decisions.
18–36 months	Embed successful elements in recognised CPD, micro-credentials, curricula, funding programmes and regional support structures.	Institutional uptake, sustainable access and transferable policy learning.

Core monitoring framework

Dimension	Suggested indicators
Reach and inclusion	Participants and SMEs by size, sector, region, role, gender and baseline maturity.
Competence	Pre/post assessment, evidence of practice and recognised CPD or micro-credentials.
Application	Priority use cases, completed risk checks, action plans and reviewed pilots.
Outcome	Time or quality improvement, avoided risk, learner benefit and decision to stop/adapt/scale.



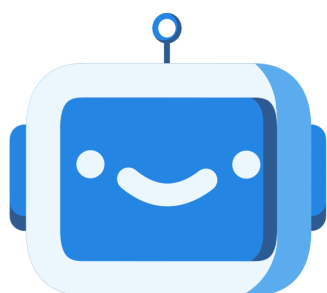
Dimension	Suggested indicators
Cooperation	Active referrals, joint activities, mentor engagement and institutional participation.
Sustainability	Resource owners, review dates, current versions, open access and continued community activity.

Final recommendations

- Use B4B to demonstrate a repeatable cooperation model linking VET professional development, SME implementation and policy learning.
- Treat responsible AI as a practical capability combining technical literacy, critical judgment, human accountability and organisational change.
- Prioritise micro-enterprises and less digitally mature territories so public support reduces rather than reproduces adoption gaps.
- Evaluate success through applied evidence and sustainable support, not only training attendance or resource production.

Overall message: Europe does not need more isolated AI awareness activities. It needs coordinated pathways that help VET professionals and SMEs select useful problems, experiment safely, apply learning responsibly and remain supported as technology and regulation evolve.

Prepared from the B4B Policy and Practice Recommendations Report and the twelve national evidence reports produced under WP5 Task 2.



Bots4Business



Co-funded by
the European Union

Co-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 European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.