

BUSINESSEUROPE REACTION TO THE GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2030

INTRODUCTION

This document sets out BusinessEurope's position on the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030. It builds directly on our March 2025 paper, "[Priorities for Strengthening Gender Equality in Europe](#)", and on our long-standing view that gender equality is both an economic and a competitiveness issue for Europe.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

BusinessEurope welcomes the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 and its recognition of gender equality as a driver of economic growth and European competitiveness.

The Strategy explicitly recalls that closing gender gaps could add 9.6% to GDP per capita and 10.5 million jobs by 2050, and that unlocking women's economic activity is central to addressing Europe's demographic and labour-shortage challenges. This is the same logic that underpins our own paper, drawing on the Draghi report and Eurostat projections of a shrinking working-age population and up to 17.3 million additional women who could join the workforce.

WHAT WE WELCOME

- The strong economic and competitiveness framing of gender equality, echoing our own key message that **increasing women's economic activity is essential for growth and for addressing labour and skills shortages**, and the 2030 headline target to halve the gender employment gap, monitored through the European Semester with national flexibility on the means. The Semester should be used to support Member States in removing tax and social security contribution disincentives to work and in advancing childcare and long-term care reforms.
- A number of concrete actions that mirror our asks: the **STEM education package** and "**Girls Go STEM**" target of one million girls by 2028, and expanded gender-smart financing targets for women's access to capital. STEM measures should be systematically linked to vocational education and training, apprenticeships and lifelong learning pathways.
- Recognition of **boys' and men's underrepresentation in certain fields** ("Boys in HEAL"), which is consistent with our own call for tackling segregation "in both directions" and promoting men's participation in underrepresented sectors.

- The commitment to **meet the revised Barcelona childcare targets**; investment in affordable, accessible childcare and long-term care remains the single most effective structural lever for women's employment.
- The welcome acknowledgment that **national tax and benefit systems** can **create disincentives** for second earners.

OUR CONCERNS

- No commitment anywhere in the Strategy to **systematic impact assessments**, as required by the Commission's own Better Regulation agenda, including competitiveness checks, for the new legislative or regulatory avenues it opens. This is particularly important where the Strategy points towards legislative follow-up despite an already dense EU and national acquis.
- **Migration and labour mobility**, including concrete asks in our paper, such as the targeted revision of the Family Reunification Directive, are entirely absent, failing to better reflect the employment potential of migrant women and the need to remove administrative and legal barriers to labour market access.
- **Digitalisation and AI** are viewed almost exclusively through a risk lens (algorithmic bias, cyberviolence, deepfakes), without giving equal weight to the opportunities that flexible, digitally enabled work can create for women's employment, particularly in remote and rural areas.
- The **role of social partners and sectoral collective agreements**, among the most effective tools for tackling labour market segregation, is referenced but not systematically operationalised across the Strategy. Social partners should be involved throughout the design, implementation and evaluation, while collective agreements and company-level initiatives should remain the preferred vehicles for workplace-related measures for delivering change on the ground.
- **Vocational education and training** (VET), a specific pillar of our own paper, receives less attention than school-level STEM and HEAL initiatives. Given VET's importance for the green and digital transitions and for SMEs' workforce needs, it should be integrated into implementation with the same ambition applied to school-level initiatives.
- On the **Work-Life Balance Directive**, the focus should be on flexible, balanced and labour-market-oriented solutions rather than on extending leave entitlements in ways that may unintentionally weaken employment continuity and career progression. Flexibility negotiated by social partners, not mandated leave extensions, remains the right approach.
- On **sexual harassment at work**, the Commission should focus on supporting implementation and enforcement of existing EU and national frameworks, including the occupational health and safety acquis, the 2007 Autonomous Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work and relevant international instruments, rather than opening a new legislative layer under the Quality Jobs Act. Cooperation between Member States and social partners to share best practice should be strengthened without adding further regulatory burdens.
- Any follow-up on **psychosocial risks** should remain risk-based, evidence-based and grounded in existing occupational health and safety risk assessment principles, rather than creating broad and legally uncertain EU minimum requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

The Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 confirms the economic framing we advocate for and delivers on several concrete BusinessEurope asks, most visibly on access to finance, care infrastructure and STEM education, alongside a welcome two-directional approach to stereotypes. At the same time, the Strategy does not sufficiently recognise the potential of migration, frames AI and digitalisation predominantly as risks rather than as opportunities, and does not sufficiently operationalise the role of social partners despite referencing social dialogue.

BusinessEurope is committed to working with the Commission, EIGE and social partners to advance the economic dimensions of this Strategy. Progress on gender equality requires removing structural barriers in care infrastructure, taxation and education, not adding layers of regulatory complexity. The Strategy should not become a gateway for new employer obligations where existing instruments can be implemented more effectively. We call on the Commission to keep competitiveness and proportionality at the heart of implementation and to treat social partners as genuine co-drivers of change.

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