

PRIORITIES FOR STRENGTHENING

GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

The challenges facing Europe, including those highlighted in the Draghi report, call for increased economic activity by all – women and men. Europe is facing an ageing and shrinking population and reduced competitiveness. Gender equality is a critical driver of economic growth, innovation and social cohesion. As the working-age population declines, it is essential to unlock untapped potential, particularly among women. Women represent the highest potential for increasing the labour force, with up to 17.3 million more active individuals by 2030.

Against this background, BusinessEurope calls for targeted action in the labour market, cultural attitudes, and education systems, with a focus on three key priorities:

- 1** INCREASING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY
- 2** FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES
- 3** TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR THE DIGITAL ERA

EU APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY

- The European Commission should adopt a holistic approach that addresses root causes of inequality, such as disparities in labour market participation conditions, and drive cultural change in all areas of society.
- All new EU legislation on gender equality should be subject to thorough impact assessments, including competitiveness checks. Furthermore, the Council and European Parliament should conduct impact assessments when proposals change significantly during negotiations.
- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) should cooperate closely with social partners to support a more analytical and evidence-based approach to gender equality initiatives.

KEY MESSAGES FOR THE POST-2025 GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

1. INCREASING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Increasing women's economic activity is key to promoting gender equality in society and contributing to European competitiveness. Although women achieve higher educational results, their employment rate remains lower than men's. They are also disproportionately represented in part-time and temporary work, with 29% of women, compared to only 8% of men. Increasing women's economic activity requires targeted reforms and coordinated efforts across several areas.


INCREASING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY REQUIRES:

➤ **Reducing the Gender Employment Gap:**

Reforms to taxation, social protection and care systems are vital to remove disincentives that mainly affect women. This supports more equal earnings and reduces both pay and pension gaps. More specifically, joint efforts are needed in the following areas:

- **Tax and Social Security Systems Conducive to Work:** Systems should be designed to encourage labour market participation and avoid penalising second earners.
- **Reducing the Gender Entrepreneurship Gap:** Women account for only 34% of the self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs





in the EU. Public-private partnerships and targeted support are key to addressing this gap.

- **Making Progress on Migrant Women's Employment:** Migrant women face particular barriers to accessing the labour market, such as limited family member access and integration support. These must be addressed to tap their potential.

Reducing the Gender Care Gap

Women still bear the majority of care responsibilities – 19% of inactive women cited caregiving as the main reason, compared to only 3% of men. Policies supporting high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare and long-term care are essential. Meeting the revised Barcelona targets would significantly boost women's labour force participation.

2. FIGHTING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Informed choices are vital to achieving greater gender equality. Understanding the economic implications of decisions related to education, occupation and labour market participation is crucial to tackling gender segregation and remuneration gaps. Stereotypes influence perceptions of careers, limiting choices and reinforcing segregation in sectors. Early education, unbiased guidance, and diverse role models are key to cultural change. Tackling these stereotypes early, both in education and the media, is essential.

Action is needed at both EU and national level to strengthen data collection, promote inclusive education systems, and align career guidance with labour market needs.

3. TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR THE DIGITAL ERA

The digital and green transitions require a workforce skilled in STEM and ICT, areas where women are still underrepresented. Only 1 in 3 STEM graduates and just 1 in 5 ICT specialists are women. Tackling this gap requires inclusive education, targeted support, mentorship, and female role models.

VET and lifelong learning programmes must integrate digital and STEM skills to equip women for the green and digital transitions. BusinessEurope has long advocated for 25% of tertiary graduates to hold a degree in a STEM-related subject by 2030. In this context, the Union of Skills' ambition for at least 45% of students in initial medium-level VET to enrol in STEM fields – with one in four being women – is welcomed.

Targeted training and reskilling are essential to ensure women benefit equally from emerging opportunities in green and digital sectors. It is equally important to promote men's labour market participation in sectors where they are underrepresented.

Read the full position paper [here](#).



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Avenue de Cortenbergh 168
 B - 1000 Brussels, Belgium
 Tel: +32(0)22376511 / Fax: +32(0)22311445
 E-mail: main@businesseurope.eu

WWW.BUSINESSEUROPE.EU

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