

Making the Next EU Multiannual Financial Framework Work for Gender Equality and Women's Rights

This policy brief presents three recommendations endorsed by a broad coalition of experts and civil society organisations (CSOs) to guide European Union (EU) institutions towards a more gender-response multiannual financial framework (MFF). It aims to ensure that the next MFF, the EU budget, is designed in a way to promote gender equality through clear provisions in line with legal commitments.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, [Article 8](#), states: “In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women.” Gender equality is a fundamental right, core value, and strategic priority of the EU, which can contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and further security. The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) recently found that reducing gender inequality could increase EU GDP by up to 9.6% by 2050, a strong economic argument for gender budgeting. The European Parliament, Council, and Commission have committed to promoting equality, rights, and opportunities for all women and men, as well as gender mainstreaming in the current [Interinstitutional Agreement](#), MFF, and EU budget. Despite commitments, the 2021 [European Court of Auditors Special Report](#) found:

the Commission had not yet lived up to its commitment to gender mainstreaming in the EU budget. The EU's budget cycle did not adequately take gender equality into account; paid little attention to the gender analysis of the policies and programmes examined; made limited use of sex-disaggregated data and indicators and published little information on the EU budget's overall impact on gender equality.

The [European Parliament](#) has stated that it “Regrets that the Commission has not systematically conducted thorough impact assessments, including gender impact assessments, for all legislation involving spending through the budget and insists that this change”. The Parliament has underlined that “that the next MFF must ensure that, across the board, spending programmes [...] promote and protect rights and equal opportunities for all, including gender equality”. Specifically, it:

Welcomes the development of a methodology to track gender-based spending and considers that the lessons learnt, in particular as regards the collection of gender-disaggregated data, the monitoring of implementation and impact and administrative burden, should be applied in the next MFF in order to improve the methodology; calls on the Commission to explore the feasibility of gender budgeting in the next MFF

Related, it previously has [welcomed](#) the Commission's work on a new:

classification to measure the gender impact of Union spending considers that the classification should provide an accurate and comprehensive representation of the impact of programmes on gender equality; calls for the classification to be extended to all MFF programmes and to be better integrated into the MFF framework; stresses, in this regard, the need for systematic collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data; expects all gender-relevant reporting to be based on volumes and not number of actions.

Based on the EU's commitments and these recommendations, we, a coalition of more than 150 CSOs across many countries, call on the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission to ensure during the forthcoming tripartite dialogue that the following recommendations are addressed in the MFF.

1. Ensure Financing for Gender Equality

Women continue to face structural inequalities and discrimination in all EU countries, as shown by the [EU Gender Equality Index](#), as well as outside the EU. Legal obligations for gender equality and EU

commitments (e.g. the next EU [Gender Equality Strategy](#), EU Gender Action Plan IV, and Women, Peace and Security Agenda) will require financing for implementation. For the next MFF to work for gender equality, it needs an ambitious target on gender equality spending. **Recommendations:**

- Set an ambitious target for gender equality spending in the MFF (like the target for climate spending).
- Ensure the MFF commits adequate financing to support implementation of the EU [Gender Equality Strategy](#), EU Gender Action Plan IV, and Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

2. Require Gender-responsive Budgeting in All EU-funded Programs

The EU should apply gender-responsive budgeting in its own work, setting a positive example for governments as well as using gender-responsive budgeting best practices to enhance its own transparency, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. Financing should be based on analysis of need and include an intersectional approach that addresses intersecting inequalities affecting diverse women and men related to their age, ethnicity, geographic location, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, and other social, economic, and demographic factors. **Recommendations:**

- Include gender equality objectives and indicators in regulations of all (relevant) funding programs, ensuring that funding is channelled to activities that explicitly support gender equality and female dominated sectors across policy fields.
- Integrate gender equality fully in the performance framework guiding the MFF.
- Update the tracking method, ensuring that it is used as an effective ex ante and ex post tool, and that it generates reliable data, to be used in budget reviews and annual budget planning.
- Include in the Common Provisions Regulation and other legal documents related to the MFF that: “All EU expenditures shall involve gender-responsive budgeting, which includes requiring: i) ex-ante gender impact assessments to inform all expenditures during the design phase; ii) establishing objectives towards gender equality accompanied by clear indicators, baselines, targets, and planned expenditures at output levels; iii) ex-post gender impact assessments as part of all evaluations; and iv) annual independent audit attending to gender equality.”

3. Ensure Oversight, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Gender Equality Results

Tracking the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of expenditures and investments is crucial for transparency and accountability to EU taxpayers as well as to monitoring and evaluating impacts of EU expenditures towards policy goals. The EU has faced challenges in demonstrating measurable progress towards furthering gender equality linked to EU expenditures. Key challenges have been: not all actions have conducted ex-ante gender impact assessments to identify the needs of diverse women and men to inform baselines; and data management systems do not allow for easily consolidating impacts linked to their costs at country, regional, or global levels. The EU can track expenditures towards results (outputs, outcomes, impact) by requiring beneficiaries to report on expenditures linked to results. This could decrease administrative burden on EU officials in data-gathering, enable global reporting on key indicators, and facilitate EU monitoring and evaluating of its strategies and impacts of expenditures. This could help the EU set clearer targets for gender equality financing based on needs, evidence, and learning. If linked to digital interfaces it could improve information-sharing, transparency, and accountability to taxpayers who could see information on expenditures and impact in real time. **Recommendation:**

- Regulations related to the MFF should include a mandate for relevant institutions including the Commission to use a reliable approach and better, more adequate digital systems for monitoring and evaluating gender equality outputs, outcomes, and impacts tied to gender equality expenditures.

This brief was written by the [Kosovo Women's Network](#) in collaboration with [Center for Research and Policy Making for the Gender Budget Watchdog Network](#), supported by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The views herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ADA and Sida. The European Women's Lobby and European Gender Budgeting Network contributed vital input and have endorsed the brief.