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Policy Brief

"Gender Budgeting in the New MFF: Moving Forward?"

Gender equality is a fundamental value and right of the European Union (EU) with the potential to contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The European Parliament and the Council have supported gender mainstreaming the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the EU budget. The European Commission proposed the new EU long-term budget 2028-2034 framework, which will be opened for debate from 12 November. During gender equality week, 3-7 November, the European Parliament is organising consultations with civil society and experts, including an exchange of views on Gender Budgeting at the Committee on Budgets to which the Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN), a coalition of more than 100 civil society organisations, is contributing on 6 November. GBWN calls on the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission to ensure that the following recommendations are addressed in the MFF 2028-2034 and related regulations during the forthcoming tripartite dialogue.

1. Finance Gender Equality Commitments

Women continue to face structural inequalities and discrimination in all EU countries, as shown by the EU Gender Equality Index, and face greater inequalities outside the EU. EU commitments to the next EU Gender Equality Strategy, EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) IV, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda require financing for implementation. The MFF must allocate financing for their objectivesse. Gender gaps identified by the EIGE Gender Equality Index, GAP III monitoring reports, and WPS Action Plan should serve as the basis for setting objectives and indicators in the EU Gender Equality Strategy and GAP.

- **Recommendation**: Ensure the MFF commits adequate financing to close gender gaps with clear objectives towards gender equality and indicators to illustrate their achievement.

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

The EU has shown its support for gender-responsive budgeting in creating and promoting the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Supplementary Framework for Assessing Gender Responsive Public Financial Management and adopting SDGs, including indicator 5.c.1. on gender budgeting. The EU should apply these tools in its own work, setting a positive example for governments as well as using these tools 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.

Most draft regulations for funding programmes do not include gender equality objectives. Without such objectives, it is unlikely that programmes will allocate funding to activities that close gender gaps. Considering that draft regulations mandate that funding is allocated based on objectives, the lack of objectives undermines the implementation of a holistic gender budgeting approach.

- **Recommendation**: Based on the PEFA Gender Framework and SDG 5.c.1., include in the MFF that: "All EU expenditures shall involve gender-responsive budgeting, which includes requiring: i) ex-ante gender impact assessments to inform how expenditures contribute to closing gender gaps; ii) establishing objectives in MFF programs in line with aforementioned gender equality strategies, 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 Results-based Monitoring, Evaluation, and Oversight to Close Gender Gaps

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) that should be related to closing gender gaps by requiring beneficiaries to report on expenditures linked to results.

The draft Expenditure Tracking and Performance Framework regulation introduces new horizontal gender mainstreaming requirements for tracking spending and sets performance indicators on gender equality. However, they do not constitute a holistic gender mainstreaming approach that would expand a focus on gender equality from programming to implementation and evaluation and ensure that the EU budget closes gender gaps. The expenditure tracking and performance framework should be aligned with the Gender Equality Strategy, EIGE Index, GAP IV, and WPS Action Plan to report progress. This will decrease administrative burden on EU officials in data-gathering, enable EIGE reporting on key indicators, and facilitate EU monitoring and evaluating of its strategies and impacts of expenditures. If linked to digital interfaces it could improve information-sharing, transparency, and accountability to taxpayers who could see information on expenditures and impact of EU budget on closing gender gaps in real time.

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

4. Maintain Commitments to Gender Equality in External Financing

Amid global cuts in development financing, and specifically to gender equality, the EU has a key role to play as a global leader in furthering progress on SDGs, preventing backsliding, and upholding its commitments to democracy, good governance, and equality. While women's rights organisations are leaders in furthering gender equality and allies to the EU in achieving its commitments, they face massive funding cuts that threaten their existence; these present significant risks to backsliding on rights and SDG commitments. Meanwhile, the EU also has an influential, transformative role in reform processes in EU Accession countries. Historically, despite commitments to ensure 85% of actions contribute to gender equality (OECD DAC Gender Marker 1), only a portion of EU actions have contributed to gender equality and incorrect marking has been identified.

- **Recommendation**: In the future external financing regulation, build on the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), with targets that 85% of all ODI financing will be Gender Marker (GM)1, 20% GM2, and 5% of ODI will directly support activities that close gender gaps. Further 5% should support women's rights groups, as proven leaders in furthering gender equality. Include specific objectives, indicators and targets towards gender equality in the regulation.

5. Improve funding for human security: social priorities and people – building blocks for achieving effective "security", defence and competitiveness priorities

The proposed MFF channels are investing in people, Member States and regions; foster education and democratic values; drive prosperity via competitiveness, research and innovation; protect people and building preparedness and resilience to face new challenges. All the objectives under these programs must not be gender neutral and will have to contribute to closing gender gaps in the area of education, politics, economy and etc. determined with the EIGE Gender Index.

The EC's MFF proposal signals a worrying shift in EU resources from social programs to security and defence. This involves a narrow definition of security that departs from Sen's concept of human security, previously adhered to and committed to, in SDGs. Defunding social programming risks falling farther behind on achieving these goals. Nor does it consider the substantial security risks that may derive from defunding social programming. Investments in military can only contribute to violence and insecurity, whereas investments in health, social welfare, and education create an enabling environment for peace and stability. Yet, the draft MFF 2028-2034 has earmarked €30.9 billion (≈12.9 %) for defense and security, up from €2.1 billion (4.4%) in the 2021-2027 MFF. Meanwhile, funding for social and people-centered policies drops from 11% to 7.2%, threatening progress on SDGs, gender equality, and the WPS Agenda.[1]

- **Recommendation**: Shift funds from militarisation and defence back to human security and social programming, including towards gender equality in compliance with Article 8 TFEU.

[1] GBWN (Gender Budget Watchdog Network), European Women's Lobby (EWL) and European Gender Budgeting Network (EGBN), "Security for Whom? Reflecting on the EU's Shifting Priorities in its New Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)". GBWN Webinar Series, 29 October 2025.