

March 27, 2026

Nicosia Declaration

Invest in What Matters for People: Placing Gender Equality, Women's Rights, Care and Social Priorities at the Core of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034

European Union (EU) budget impacts people's lives in member states and globally. It also signals what matters for the EU decision-makers and how they see Europe's future. The EU's next long-term budget represents a decisive opportunity to safeguard and strengthen the true foundations of prosperity, peace and democracy: gender equality, care and other social priorities, and environmental sustainability. However, the European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 falls short of responding to challenges faced by people today and fails to prioritise what truly matters for people's lives.

Gender equality and women's rights are a long-standing EU value and priority. They are indispensable to democracy, human security, prosperity and resilience in Europe. Yet gender equality and women's rights and funding to promote them are under attack across the EU. It is therefore more critical than ever that the EU promotes women's rights and gender equality through its budget and sends a clear signal that these are priorities for the EU as a whole.

What the European Commission Proposes

1. Funding priorities undermine social and gender equality objectives

The proposed MFF reallocates significant resources toward security, defence, and competitiveness. In parallel, funding for gender equality, care, social inclusion and people-centred policies is expected to decline. Without gender equality at its core, a focus on security, defence, and competitiveness will be less effective and generate negative impacts. This shift risks privileging male-dominated sectors and reducing investment in initiatives that contribute to comprehensive security, social resilience and equality. It undermines the EU's obligations to gender equality under the Treaties, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and risks increasing inequalities across Member States and the globe.

2. Absence of gender equality objectives in program regulations

Most draft program regulations under the proposed EU budget lack explicit gender equality objectives. As program objectives determine funding allocation, this omission seriously undermines the EU's ability to deliver on its equality commitments and weakens any meaningful Gender Budgeting approach. The proposals increasingly frame gender equality as a principle to be "taken into account," rather than as a concrete objective to be financed, implemented and achieved. Only the Global Europe instrument integrates gender equality more systematically as an explicit program objective.

3. Risk of symbolic compliance through limited gender mainstreaming

The proposed Expenditure Tracking and Performance Framework Regulation introduces new horizontal Gender Mainstreaming requirements to a limited degree. Gender Mainstreaming cannot be reduced to tracking expenditures. A comprehensive approach must span the entire budgetary cycle, including legislative basis, program design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. While the monitoring framework foresees gender-disaggregated indicators "where appropriate", it does not define indicators capable of measuring substantive gender equality outcomes. The removal of sound gender mainstreaming provisions, which are integrated in some programmes of the current MFF, creates a serious risk of institutionalising a form of "window dressing" that weakens existing practices and undermines tangible progress toward gender equality.

The Way Forward: Our Call to EU Institutions

These shortcomings must be addressed in the negotiations on the MFF 2028–2034 to ensure that the EU invests in what matters for the people. We therefore call on the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council to:

1. **Prioritise and earmark funding for gender equality, women’s rights, care, social priorities and human security.** Key programs for advancing gender equality must be allocated dedicated and sufficient resources, including *AgoraEU*, *the National and Regional Partnership Fund* and *Global Europe*.
2. **Include explicit gender equality objectives in all funding programme regulations.** The Roadmap for Women’s Rights and the Declaration of Principles for a Gender-Equal Society, endorsed by all Member States and EU institutions, provide a strong foundation. Without explicit gender equality objectives, it is unlikely that programmes will allocate adequate funding to the promotion of gender equality.
3. **Establish spending targets for gender equality.** An ambitious expenditure target for gender equality should be established for headings 1 and 2, in line with the spending targets for other horizontal priorities, including, climate and biodiversity, and social policies. In external action, we call for a commitment that: (i) at least 85% of funding contributes to gender equality; (ii) at least 20% has gender equality as a principal objective, and (iii) at least 5% is earmarked for women’s rights organisations, recognising their proven leadership in advancing equality in line with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.
4. **Integrate comprehensive gender mainstreaming throughout the MFF.** Gender mainstreaming must cover all stages of the budgetary process. A dedicated provision should be added to the Performance Framework Regulation and specific gender mainstreaming articles included in each program regulation, building on best practices from the 2021-2027 MFF.
5. **Strengthen monitoring of gender equality results and improve expenditure tracking.** The monitoring framework should be revised to measure progress toward EU gender equality goals. Annex I of the Performance Framework Regulation must be amended to ensure that interventions classified as having gender equality as a principal objective reflect the Declaration of Principles for a Gender-Equal Society and thus ensure financing for EU gender equality priorities.
6. **Ensure full compliance with EU Treaty obligations.** Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) obliges the EU to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between women and men in all its activities. Provisions in the proposed Performance Framework Regulation, notably Annex IV and Article 7(1), which limit support for gender equality must be deleted or amended to ensure compliance with primary EU law.
7. **Embed gender equality in National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).** Gender equality objectives must be mandatory within NRPPs. Independent gender equality bodies must have a clearly defined role in their development. This requirement should be explicitly reflected in the NRPP regulation.

The Way Forward: Our Call to People Living in Europe

We call on all people living in Europe to step forward and use their voice to shape the next EU budget. We call on them to use this opportunity – only coming every seven years – and demand their governments, members of national and European Parliament and the European Commission to make the EU budget work for all people.

We count on you and our joint creativity to make our voices echo throughout Europe and in the institutional corridors. The time to make a difference for the lives of people in Europe is now!