

EUROPEAN GENDER BUDGETING NETWORK POSITION PAPER

PUTTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS AT THE CORE OF THE NEXT EU BUDGET (MFF 2028–2034)

A substantive approach to gender equality is missing and must be reinstated and strengthened

The European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 marks a worrying shift in the EU's approach to promoting gender equality through its budget. While new horizontal provisions on expenditure tracking and monitoring are proposed, the overall framework represents a step back from the current dual approach that combines targeted action and gender mainstreaming. This means the EU's commitment to gender equality is being **de facto weakened**, and the proposed MFF could even have **negative effects** on gender equality. Strikingly, external action remains the only area where gender equality objectives and gender mainstreaming obligations are systematically integrated into the draft programme regulation.

1. Absence of gender equality objectives in most programme regulations risks sidelining equality in EU funding

Most draft funding programme regulations **lack explicit gender equality objectives**. Without such objectives, programmes are unlikely to allocate funding to activities that promote equality — undermining the EU's commitments to maintain and advance gender equality. Because programme objectives determine funding allocation, the absence of gender equality objectives **undermines a holistic gender budgeting approach**. The proposals suggest that gender equality is increasingly treated as a mere principle to be “**taken into account**” rather than a **goal to be funded and achieved**. Only in the Global Europe instrument — covering external relations — is gender equality systematically included as an objective.

2. Risk of window dressing: Gender mainstreaming reduced to tracking and monitoring

The proposed *Expenditure Tracking and Performance Framework Regulation* introduces new horizontal gender mainstreaming requirements focused on tracking expenditure. It mandates breaking down performance indicators by gender “where appropriate” — but **fails to define indicators to measure actual gender equality results**. This narrow focus does **not amount to a comprehensive gender mainstreaming approach**, which should extend from programming to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The new requirements also do not compensate for the detailed gender mainstreaming provisions found in the current MFF (2021–2027), which are now being removed. There is a clear risk that the new system becomes **mere window dressing**, institutionalising partial gender mainstreaming in form but not in substance — and thereby **undermining existing programme-level practices**.

3. Shift of funding priorities towards security, defence, and competitiveness undermines social and gender equality objectives

The proposed MFF channels substantial resources into “**security**”, **defence**, and **competitiveness**, with significant nominal and relative increases in comparison to the current MFF. In contrast, the share of funding dedicated to **social priorities** and **people-centred policies** will decline sharply. This shift means **less funding for initiatives that benefit women and promote gender equality**, and **more resources for male-dominated sectors** at the core of new priorities. It risks reversing progress toward the EU's human security and gender equality commitments, including the **Sustainable Development Goals** and the **Women, Peace and Security Agenda**.

THE WAY FORWARD: STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MFF 2028–2034

Include gender equality objectives in all funding programme regulations.

The *Roadmap for Women's Rights* and the *Declaration for a Gender-Equal Society* (adopted by the European Commission in March 2025) provide a sound basis for formulating such objectives. Without explicit gender equality objectives in programme regulations, the EU budget cannot deliver on its equality commitments, as funding allocations depend on the objectives set.

Integrate comprehensive gender mainstreaming provisions in the MFF.

These should follow established standards, covering all stages of the budgetary process — from preparation and design to implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation. A dedicated provision should be added to the *Performance Framework Regulation* to complement the limited expenditure-tracking rule, and specific mainstreaming articles should be included in each programme regulation, building on best practices from the 2021–2027 MFF.

Strengthen gender equality expenditure tracking and monitoring.

Revise Annex I of the *Performance Framework Regulation* to ensure that the list of interventions classified as “score 2” (with gender equality as a principal objective) accurately reflects EU gender equality goals. Performance indicators should be revised to monitor actual gender equality results.

Secure adequate and earmarked funding for gender equality and women's rights.

Programmes critical for advancing gender equality — such as *AgoraEU* (the main instrument for promoting equality and combating gender-based violence) and *Global Europe* (linked to the forthcoming *Gender Action Plan IV*) — should have dedicated and sufficient resources.

Ensure compliance with Treaty obligations (Article 8 TFEU).

The EU is bound to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between women and men in all its activities. Annex IV (and Article 7(1)) of the *Performance Framework Regulation* which limits the list of programmes aiming to support gender equality should therefore be deleted or amended to bring the proposal into compliance with Treaty obligations.

Embed gender equality in National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

Gender equality objectives should be a key requirement in NRPPs, and **independent gender equality bodies** must have a formal role in their elaboration. This should be explicitly required in the NRPP regulation.