



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Walk-the-talk: EU funds must mirror women's equality

An EU budget that fully finances equality between women and men as a political priority

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On 27 May 2020, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, presented an economic stimulus package to tackle the devastating impacts of COVID-19 in Europe, consisting of a €750 billion recovery instrument (Next Generation EU 2021-2024), alongside a €1.1 trillion Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027.¹

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organisation representing over 2,000 women's associations across Europe and its accession countries, **is deeply concerned about the significant reduction of 20% to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund.** This will lead to the subsequent dilution of funds within the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme** (hereby the Rights and Values programme), the only programme specifically targeted towards advancing women's rights, eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, and providing crucial resources to civil society organisations, including women-led and feminist organisations.

These cuts are completely contrary to the EU's commitment to protecting and promoting the rights and values enshrined in the EU Treaties², including equality between women and men. It goes against one of the core objectives of the Rights and Values programme, as well as the European Commission's five-year Gender Equality Strategy adopted in March 2020, to which no targeted funds have been allocated. We recall the European Parliament and Council's common understanding of the Rights and Values programme of March 2019, in which **"The promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, in all activities of the Union is (...) a core task for the Union and a driver for economic growth and social development."**³ The EU must **walk-the-talk** and not turn its back on equality between women and men as a fundamental right as part of its recovery plans.

EWL recalls the inconsistent integration of targeted gender mainstreaming measures across EU funds and programmes. In the European Commission's 2019 programme statements of the current EU budget 2014-2020, only 11 out of the 60 spending programmes had provided some financial estimates in regards to the EU Budget's contribution to gender mainstreaming.⁴ In 2019, EIGE found that **only 1% of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds were allocated towards specific gender equality measures.**⁵ We further recall the welcomed announcement in February 2020 by the European Court of Auditors who will be examining the current MFF to assess whether gender mainstreaming has been applied in the EU budget to promote equality between women and men.⁶

These very limited funds explain the snail's pace of progress on gender equality: in 2019, the EU's Gender Equality Index scored 67.4 out of 100, a miniscule increase of 5 points since 2005.⁷ The Commission's new proposal for the MFF will detrimentally set this progress back even further. While

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940

² Article 2 TEU, Article 8 TFEU ('gender mainstreaming' clause), and Article 23 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

³ para 8 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7249-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ See: European Commission, [Draft General Budget of the European Union for the financial year 2020 – Working document part 1: Programme statements of operational expenditure](#), COM(2019)400, June 2019, p10.

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-equality-deserves-more-1>

⁶ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/NewsItem.aspx?nid=13421>

⁷ See: EIGE, [Gender Equality Index for the EU for 2019](#)

the new proposal acknowledges women as ‘overrepresented and underpaid in many front-line jobs’, and takes steps under Next Generation EU to strengthen health systems, protect workers and SMEs, it fails to capture to the fullest extent, the deep-seeded inequalities between women and men made even more visible by COVID-19.

In this ongoing public health crisis, women have stepped up to balance their employment responsibilities with unpaid, invisible care work; women’s unemployment rates are spiking, and their risk of poverty increasing; women have been confined under the same roof with a violent partner and only now, will we see the consequences of the lockdown in full. This crisis is bringing to light systemic inequalities that set women back, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, coupled with factors including race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, class, and/or migration status.

Yet women have also been at the forefront, exposed to the highest risks of infection, working as cashiers, cleaners, elderly and dependant person carers, or frontline health workers (including those still studying). **At a time when structural inequalities and racism are being challenged, it is contradictory to reduce critical funds to address these issues in a meaningful and substantive way, and completely contrary to the values of the EU.** The EU’s next long-term budget must urgently reflect women’s diverse perspectives and realities across all policy areas and step up its efforts towards equality between women and men.

Urgent need to avoid backtracking on women’s rights

a) Redress cuts and increase funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme

Civil society organisations, including those led by women and feminist organisations, are crucial to raising awareness of injustices on the ground. EWL’s members have been imperative to testifying of the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women and girls during this pandemic,⁸ whilst also providing crucial services to victims of male violence, homeless women, and women with disabilities, as examples, often on a voluntary or under-resourced basis.

EWL is deeply concerned about the lack of regard for the critical role of women’s civil society organisations in the Commission’s proposal reflected through the disjointed allocation of funds, which have been declining in the last decade as a result of austerity. In 2018, the Commission proposed €947 million in current prices to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund,⁹ with €641 million to the Rights and Values programme and €305 million to the Justice programme. **In 2020, the Commission has now reduced the Justice, Rights and Values Fund to €761 million in current prices, a deduction of €186 million.** These cuts form only a drop in the ocean of the EU’s long-term budget, yet have enormous and far-reaching ripple effects on women’s and girls’ rights now and over the next seven years.

Further exacerbating this is the projection of annual amounts, unadjusted for inflation over 2021-2027. With no mid-term review of the new MFF foreseen,¹⁰ and along with halved margins under Heading II: Cohesion and Values, the elimination of crucial safeguards and future-proofing, coupled with complex administrative processes and co-funding requirements, will make funds almost entirely impossible to access, particularly for smaller women’s and grassroots organisations.

Given that women’s civil society organisations are already operating within an increasingly shrinking civic space, often against oppressive political contexts, this proposal will only worsen their situation and detrimentally set back the advancement of women’s fundamental rights in the EU.

A 20% reduction to the Rights and Values programme would amount to an estimated €500-€510 million in current prices under this new proposal, with approximately €320-€330 million shared

⁸ See: EWL’s policy brief: “[Women must not pay the price for COVID-19!](#)”

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A383%3AREV1>

¹⁰ See: [Finnish Presidency’s MFF 2021-2027: Negotiating Box with figures](#)

between the Equality, Rights and Gender Equality strand and the Daphne strand. **This would mean an annual budget under €47 million in current prices.** Given that the costs to address violence against women in the EU is €226 billion per year,¹¹ and noting the alarming increase of domestic violence cases during COVID-19, funds under Daphne will be completely insufficient to address this issue.

Cuts in the Rights and Values programme will have detrimental impacts on women on the ground across the EU. A 2019 study conducted by FEMM on the current Daphne programme¹² found that the demand for funding had increased since the previous programming period, with almost half the total applications received for the Rights, Education and Citizenship (REC) programme 2014-2020 directed to Daphne. Yet, of the 380 applications received on average, only 11% of the funding requested had been approved due to the limited budget.

The same is true for accession countries, for example, our members in Serbia who have been unable to access national funds in the past three years due to a lack of calls for projects working with women victims of male violence. Under Daphne, they have obtained crucial funds to work on ending online sexual violence and violence in intimate youth relationships, and are now seeking additional funds. If this funding is not approved, it will mean partially cutting back the provision of their legal and psychosocial services. **Redressing the cuts made to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund, and subsequently increasing funds to the Daphne strand** is thus tantamount to ensuring sustainable funding for crucial projects working on eliminating violence against women and girls.

EWL calls on the European Parliament and Council to keep true to their words in their 2019 agreement whereby **“an increase in funding and adequate financial support are key to the development of a conducive and sustainable environment for civil society organisations to strengthen their role and perform their functions independently and effectively”**¹³, by increasing funds to the Rights and Values programme to €1.83 billion in current prices as per the European Parliament’s proposal.

b) Protect funds to the European Institute for Gender Equality

EU decentralised agencies such as EIGE and FRA are critical to advancing equality between women and men, and are central to EWL’s work as well as the work to provide data, research and identifying gaps. Within the MFF, Heading II: Cohesion and Values is paramount to advancing fundamental human rights, democracy and financing these institutions.¹⁴ Yet the Commission is now proposing a decrease of **45% to decentralised agencies**, amounting to €1.6 billion in current prices, compared to their 2018 proposal of €2.9 billion in current prices.

This is extremely concerning, given that EIGE’s expertise on gender equality and gender mainstreaming contributes to gathering research and sex-disaggregated data to address gender inequality gaps and capture women’s diverse experiences across the EU and in developing the now annual Gender Equality Index. Despite this, they receive less than one-fifth of the average funding given to all other decentralised agencies and further decreases will defunct their contributions to gender equality. There can be no cost-cutting exercise when it comes to advancing equality between women and men. The recent vote in the European Parliament calling for the Commission to conduct a feasibility study looking at potentially merging EIGE and FRA,¹⁵ **deeply worrying, given the ongoing gender neutrality reflected throughout recent political and economic decisions.** Equality between women and men is both a horizontal issue and a standalone objective working for half the population (i.e. the definition

¹¹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/estimating-costs-in-european-union>

¹² p 29, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608857/IPOL_STU\(2019\)608857_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/608857/IPOL_STU(2019)608857_EN.pdf)

¹³ Para 18 of the European Parliament and Council’s common agreement, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7249-2019-INIT/en/pdf>, referencing the European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0184_EN.pdf

¹⁴ Under the current MFF 2014-2020, EIGE and FRA are funded under Heading 3: Security and Citizenship

¹⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0058_EN.html

of gender mainstreaming). **Redressing the proposed cuts to EIGE and ensuring its sustained financing to protect one of the EU's fundamental values is paramount.**

c) Include women's essential perspectives when funding all political choices

While EWL welcomes some future-looking aspects of the Commission's new proposal, including the move towards a green and digital Europe, we remain highly concerned at the lack of gender dimension across all programmes as well as targeted objectives focused on advancing women's rights. **EWL stresses the absolute necessity to ensure a gender perspective is incorporated across all political priorities to ensure women and men are equally treated under all EU initiatives and programmes.** A gender budgeting lens must be integrated across all budgetary processes with targeted, gender responsive measures, including gender impact assessments, allocated to correct inequalities and gender-biases repeatedly entrenched in funds. Not only will this eliminate gender gaps, it will further enhance women's participation in budgetary preparation processes whilst ensuring that public money is being spent to close gaps in inequality between women and men.

Investments are not gender neutral and the EU must rectify this by committing to equality between women and men across all domains, by breaking traditionally male-dominated sectors to enhance women's participation, including in agricultural, maritime and fisheries, climate and digital spaces.

Recommendations

EWL urgently calls on the political commitment of EU decision-makers and EU Member States to remedy the following before the adoption of the next seven-year budget:

1. **Increase funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to €1.83 billion in current prices** as per the European Parliament's calls¹⁶ and put the €186 million in current prices back into the Justice, Rights Values Funds as a minimum.
2. **Earmark 40% of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values financial envelope to the Daphne strand** as per the demands of the European Parliament,¹⁷ to address the alarming surge in cases of male violence against women during COVID-19 and to fully resource women's civil society organisations.
3. **Maintain the €2.9 billion in current prices to decentralised agencies including EIGE** as a minimum, to ensure its ongoing, fully funded work to advancing equality between women and men as mandated.
4. **Ensure a gender perspective across all funding areas and adopt a gender budgeting lens** across all programmes, including concrete objectives, targets, *ex ante* gender impact assessments, indicators (i.e. EIGE's Gender Equality Index), regular review cycles, tracking and correction mechanisms, and drawing on sex-disaggregated data, to alleviate any detrimental effects funds may have on women.

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Funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union

¹⁶ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html

¹⁷ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html