

European Union gender budgeting – state of play 2024

KEY FINDINGS

- The European Commission adopted the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy to achieve significant progress towards gender equality across the EU by 2025. This included the introduction of the gender budgeting methodology in 2021. The methodology was applied retrospectively to the budgets of 2021, 2022 and 2023.
- In the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2020 gender mainstreaming was reinforced by introducing gender impact assessments and evaluations under the Better Law-Making framework. The Commission was also requested to develop a methodology to measure expenditure related to gender at programme level.
- Gender budgeting is a tool that helps to establish gender equality and gender mainstreaming. It redistributes the budget rather than increases it.
- The gender budgeting methodology categorises programmes using scores (2, 1, 0*, 0). However, vague criteria like 'potential to contribute' (score of 0*) and limited data undermine its accuracy and transparency.
- Only 2% of total funds are assigned to programmes with gender equality as their primary goal (score of 2), 9% of total funds are assigned to programmes which received a score of 1 and 69% of funds are assigned to programmes with a score of 0.
- Inconsistent data across programmes leads to a significant proportion of budgets being classified as 0* or 0.
- Gender budgeting has been applied primarily as a tracking mechanism rather than being embedded throughout the entire budget cycle, from planning to evaluation. This limits its transformative potential.
- Secondary effects and broader societal factors remain difficult to quantify under the current methodology, limiting its effectiveness.
- A comprehensive review of the methodology is needed ahead of the 2028-2034 MFF to address data gaps and clarify scoring criteria. Clear priorities and a transparent framework are essential to avoid superficial compliance and achieve meaningful gender equality outcomes.

In March 2020, the European Commission adopted its 2020-2025 gender equality strategy, which delivers on President von der Leyen's commitment to achieving a European Union (EU) of equality. It sets out policy objectives and initiatives to achieve significant progress towards a gender-equal Europe by 2025.¹ In line with this strategy, the Commission developed a methodology to measure expenditure contributing to gender equality at the programme level in the 2021-2027 multiannual

¹ European Commission, [Gender Equality Strategy](#).



financial framework (MFF). In the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020², gender mainstreaming was reinforced by introducing gender impact assessments and evaluations under the Better Law-Making framework. The Commission was also requested to develop a methodology to measure expenditure related to gender at programme level. This briefing³ will present the current state of gender budgeting, focusing on the methodology applied by the EU, as well as an overview of its achievements and shortcomings in recent years.

Gender budgeting

Gender budgeting is the application of gender mainstreaming to the budgetary process. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines gender mainstreaming as ‘the systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions’.⁴ According to the European Court of Auditors (ECA), this entails ‘considering gender when preparing, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes’.⁵ In turn, gender budgeting entails incorporating a gender perspective into every stage of the budgetary process, with the broader objective of promoting gender equality.

Gender budgeting is a matter of redistributing the budget rather than increasing it. It is a way to address gender inequality and improve the specific needs of women by redirecting the budget towards other types of investments. It leads to good and democratic governance, economic prosperity, accountability and transparency, gender participation, and efficiency and effectiveness of resources.⁶ According to EIGE, ‘gender budgeting is a condition for sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union’.⁷

In 2021, the ECA published a special report on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget and found that the 2014-2020 MFF did not adequately take gender equality into account.⁸ In particular, it noted that the Commission made little information available on the impact of the budget on gender equality, and that this data was lacking due to differences in methods used across Directorates-General. It recommended that the Commission implement an overarching system to track funding allocation for gender equality across programmes, as was already in place for climate action. A follow-up to the ECA report is scheduled for 2024.

Gender budgeting methodology

The methodology is based on the OECD’s gender equality policy marker, a ‘qualitative statistical tool’⁹ which monitors development activities that focus on gender equality as a policy objective and tracks the financial flows that support this objective. The methodology of the Commission applies to all spending programmes of the EU budget under shared, direct, and indirect management. Its purpose is to categorise these programmes by attributing scores, based on their

² [Interinstitutional Agreement](#) between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources of 16 December 2020.

³ See previous expertise: [Gender budgeting in the Member States](#); [EU gender budgeting: where do we stand?](#); [Gender responsive EU budgeting – Update of the study on ‘The EU budget for gender equality’ and review of its conclusions and recommendations](#);

⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality, [Gender Equality in Academia and Research - GEAR tool](#).

⁵ European Court of Auditors, Audit preview, [Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget](#).

⁶ European Institute for Gender Equality, [Gender budgeting](#).

⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality, [Gender budgeting](#).

⁸ European Court of Auditors, Special Report, [Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget: time to turn words into action](#).

⁹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), [DAC gender equality policy marker](#).

relevance to gender equality. These scores range from 2 to 0 in accordance with the objective of the spending programmes.

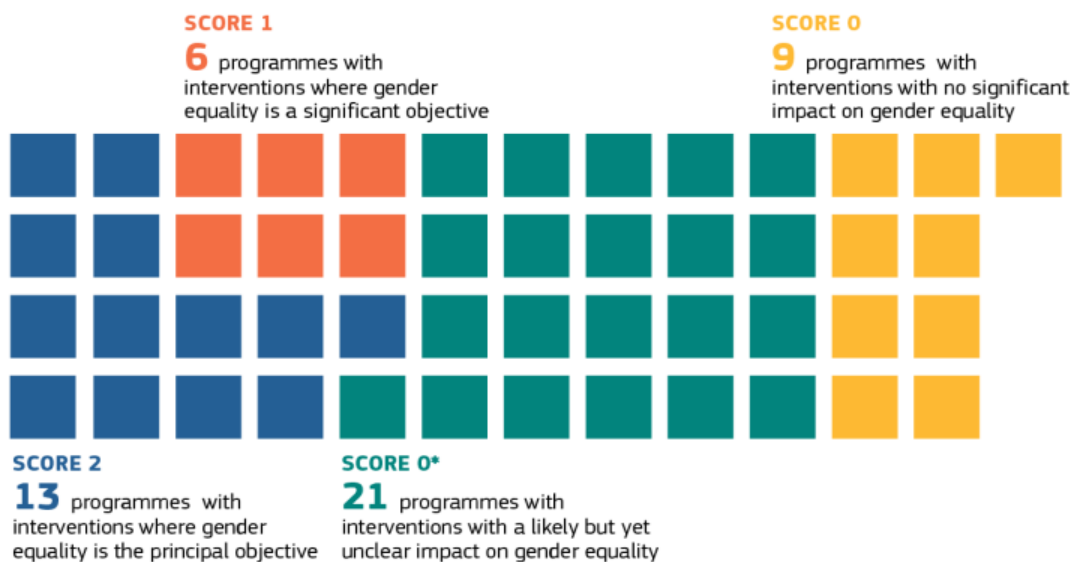
The highest score an intervention can obtain is 2; it corresponds to interventions whose principal objective is the improvement of gender equality. For instance, initiatives specifically targeting gender-based violence. A score of 1 is attributed to interventions having gender equality as an important and deliberate objective, but not as the main reason for the intervention. This can be the case for programmes related to education and training, which place an emphasis on promoting gender-balanced participation. The methodology assigns a score of 0* to programmes that can have an important impact on gender equality but where the actual impact is yet unclear. Finally, a score of 0 corresponds to interventions which are not expected to have a significant bearing on gender equality.

This methodology was first applied across all spending programmes for the 2021 financial year, in preparation for the 2023 draft budget. It remained unchanged for the 2022 and 2023 financial years.

State of play

Figure 2 shows the number of programmes with a gender equality impact. This shows that the majority are assigned 0*. Hence, for most funds it is not clear whether or not they are expected to have an impact on gender equality. Programmes often receive a score of 0* because only limited data is available or because of a lack of an assessment of the gender equality perspective in the design phase.

Figure 2: Number of programmes with gender equality intervention (classified by their highest score in 2023 (without the Resilience and Recovery Fund))



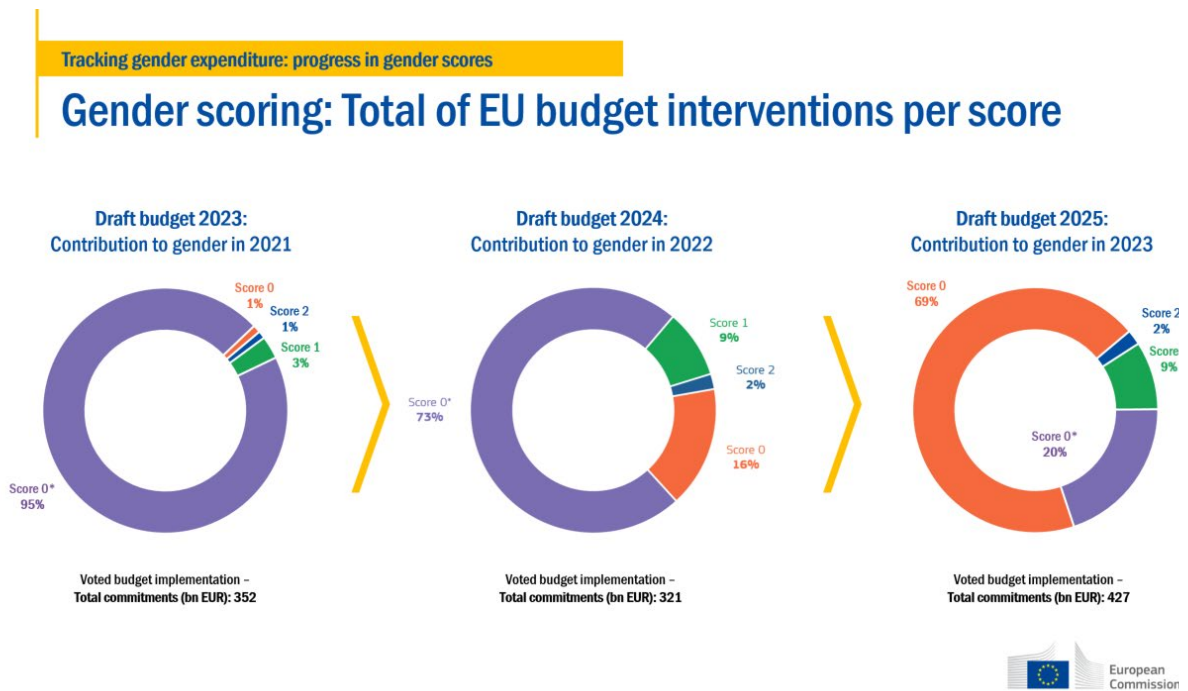
Source: European Commission, [Gender Equality Mainstreaming](#).

It should also be considered that in the graph, programmes are categorised solely based on the highest score attributed to one of the actions pertaining to them. This can potentially lead to a distorted view, as a programme might receive a score of 2 even if only a small part of its budget has

gender equality as its main objective. Another limitation of the graph is that the funding allocated to each programme is not equal. Hence, the 13 programmes given a score of 2 only represent 2% of the total funding and the 16 programmes with a score of 1 cover only 9%, whereas the programmes with a score of 0 represent 69% of the funding.¹⁰ This means that the total funding actually directed toward gender equality is rather low.

Figure 3 shows the progress in scoring over the years. It shows a clear improvement in data as fewer programmes are scored 0*. However, the majority of programmes are scored as no significant gender impact with a score of 0. In principle this is not wrong, but it does not take into account the fact that all policies have a gender dimension.

Figure 3: Gender budgeting scoring over the year

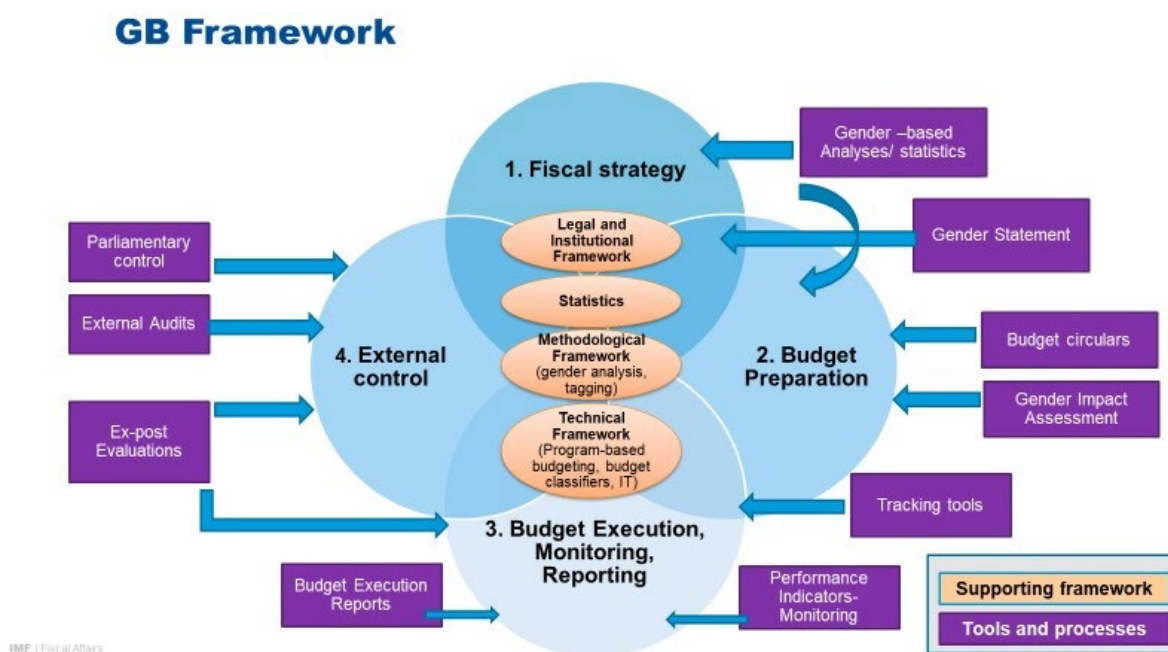


Gender budgeting is based on the principle that attention is paid to gender equality throughout the whole life cycle of the budget: the planning, preparation, implementation, and control phases of the programming cycle. This is a challenge at EU level, since gender budgeting was introduced partially, and much remains to be done to integrate it throughout the whole life cycle of the spending programmes and thus the budget cycle. Figure 4 illustrates the crucial supporting framework, tools and processes needed to apply gender budgeting in all phases of the budget cycle.

¹⁰ European Commission, [Gender equality mainstreaming](#).

For this MFF period, tracking tools have been established. Tracking is a good starting point as it gives a clear overview of the gaps in knowledge about the gender equality measures taken by the EU and the lack of data.

Figure 4: Gender Budgeting Framework for the budget cycle



Source: IMF PFM Blog, [Public Financial Management](#).

The next step would be to evaluate the process of gender budgeting in the current MFF period and prepare for the MFF post 2027. This would include setting clear priorities via a targeted approach: objectives, activities, indicators and adequate budget allocations would be part of the planning stage. Once there is a clear understanding of the targets that need to be reached, tracking will be easier. Setting a clear framework will also prevent gender budgeting from becoming a simple box ticking exercise.

Currently, it is difficult to collect the necessary data, which leads to a lot of programmes being given a score of 0* as shown in Figure 2. Contracts granted through the EU budget follow various procedures, and very often, the Commission and the Member States share management responsibilities. This leads to fragmentation in reporting obligations, and gaps in data on gender budgeting. Once gender budgeting is integrated from the start of the programmes, it will also be possible to collect proper data, as this will be a requirement to receive funding.

The new Financial Regulation of September 2024 states that performance indicators for the budget should be introduced and that gender equality should be taken into account in the sector-specific rules through a gender mainstreaming methodology. It also underlines that 'where appropriate, the data collected in relation to such indicators shall be broken down by gender and shall be collected in a way allowing for aggregation of such data across all relevant programmes.'¹¹ This would be a very good step in the process of making gender budgeting part of the whole budget cycle by introducing clear gender indicators in all the programmes from the start.

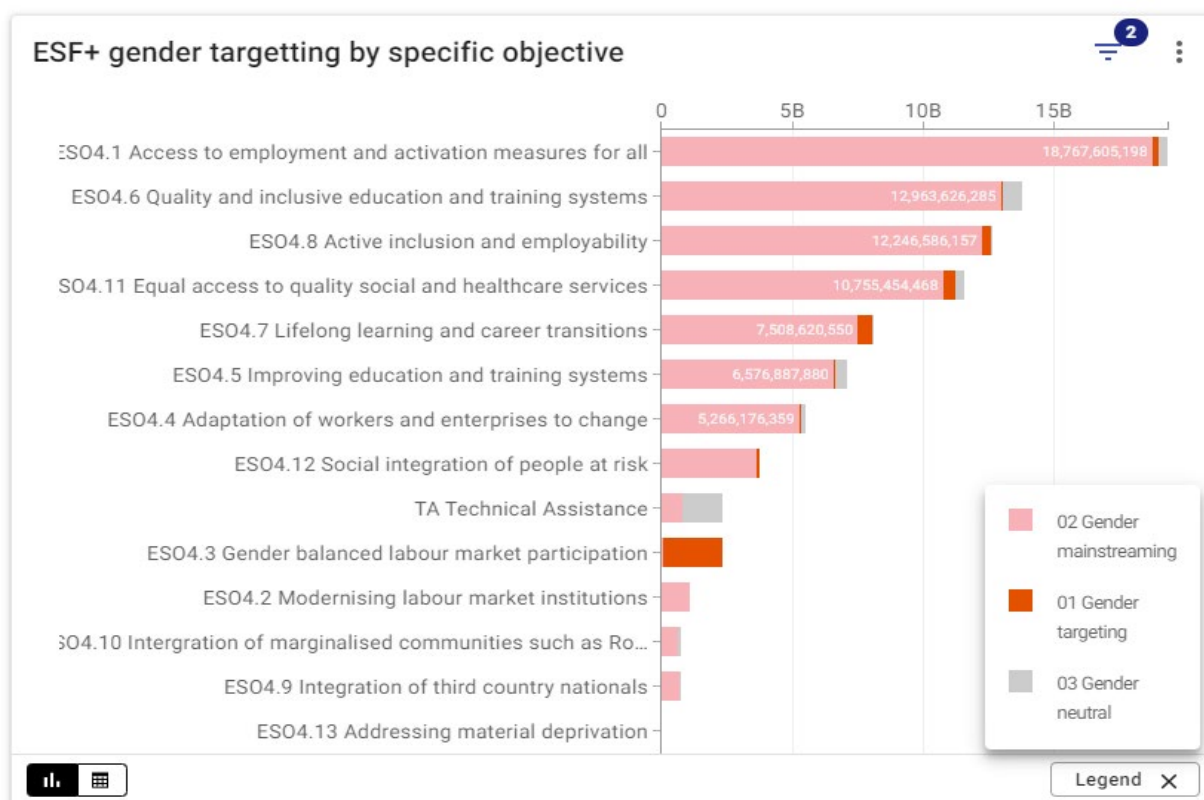
¹¹ [Financial Regulation, applicable to the general budget of the Union \(recast\)](#), September 2024. Recitals 24 and article 33 (2f) and (3).

Measures taken to promote gender equality can lead to both direct and indirect outcomes. This means that it might be difficult to prove direct causality between budgetary measures and gender equality outcomes. These effects can be positive, for example opening a childcare facility leads to more women having the capacity to re-enter the workforce. They can also be negative, such as when investing in a new road rather than investing in a new metro station: women use public transportation more frequently and would benefit from the new metro station as it would broaden their geographical mobility and employment opportunities; men drive to work more frequently and therefore benefit more from the new road.¹² Hence, the focus of budgetary measures on the indirect effects of funding decisions should be increased.

Examples

Under the current MFF, the gender equality requirements have been strengthened for all cohesion policy programmes. In particular, the Regulation for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) provides additional obligations for the Commission and Member States to enhance the gender dimension. These include requirements to support targeted actions (Figure 5) to increase the participation of women in employment, and to combat the feminisation of poverty and gender discrimination in the labour market, education and training.

Figure 5: ESF+ gender scores



Source: European Commission, [Cohesion Policy: supporting gender equality](#).

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) included a commitment, enforced by the European Parliament, to take gender equality into account. Investments fully targeted towards gender

¹² M. Gupta, S. Bandyopadhyay, M. Mahapatro, and S. Jha, [PROTOCOL: The effects of road infrastructure, and transport and logistics services interventions on women's participation in informal and formal labour markets in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review](#).

equality (score of 2) include for example: the national roll-out of 'early aid' for socially disadvantaged pregnant women in Austria; incentives to foster female entrepreneurship in Italy; and the set-up of a national plan to tackle gender-based violence in Spain. Additionally, investments whose main goal is not gender equality but nonetheless contribute directly or indirectly to gender equality (score of 1) include: the improvement of working conditions for professions traditionally performed by women (e.g. the operationalisation of work cards for domestic workers in Romania); investments in the re-skilling of disadvantaged groups, including girls and women (e.g. the 'Solas recovery skills response' programme in Ireland); and investments to improve the delivery of care to older people and people with disabilities, a task often taken up by women in the household (e.g. the improvement of home healthcare in Greece).

The tracking of gender spending is further developed in some headings than in others. For example, the programmes under Heading 6 – 'Neighbourhood and the World' score better under this methodology as external action has made gender one of its cross-cutting priorities since the introduction of the first Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010-2015).¹³ Building on this groundwork, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III (2021–2025) provides a comprehensive policy framework designed to accelerate progress toward international gender equality commitments. It makes the promotion of gender equality a priority for all external policies and actions. The GAP III lays out a clear roadmap for working together with stakeholders at national, regional and multilateral levels; steps up action in strategic thematic areas; calls for the institutions to lead by example; and ensures the transparency of the results.¹⁴ For example, the EU4Gender equality programme 2020-2023 was allocated EUR 9.7 million under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument programme, in the Eastern Partnership.¹⁵ This initiative aims to promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the Eastern Neighbourhood by challenging gender stereotypes, focusing on violence prevention, and encouraging men's active participation in caregiving.

On the other hand, programmes in Heading 1 – 'Single Market, Innovation and Digital' have mostly obtained a score of 0 or 0*. Since 2021, Horizon Europe is the only funding programme under the heading with interventions having obtained a score above 0*.¹⁶ All the other programmes under this heading have either obtained 0 or 0*.

Conclusion

Gender budgeting at EU level has evolved over the past few years. Since the launch of gender mainstreaming in the EU budget methodology in 2021, it has been applied retrospectively to the budgets of 2021, 2022, and 2023. Challenges remain as regards the methodology and the application of gender budgeting. The lack of data and the quality of the available data results in most programmes receiving a score of 0*. Another issue is that while the tracking of the indicators has been established as a practice at the monitoring stage, gender budgeting has not become part of the budget and programming cycle as a whole.

¹³ European Commission, [Gender equality and empowering women and girls](#).

¹⁴ European Commission, [Gender Action Plan - putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world](#).

¹⁵ European Commission, [Sustainable Development goals](#).

¹⁶ European Commission, [Budget contribution - gender equality](#).

An evaluation of the methodology could be useful in the preparation of the next MFF. This evaluation could be used to develop the methodology further and address the gaps in data from the beginning of the next round of programming. Eventually, gender budgeting could be a fully integrated part of the budget cycle on which policy and budgetary decisions could be based. The new Financial Regulation is a good starting point in this regard.

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Administrator responsible: Alexandra POWELS
Contact: poldep-budg@ep.europa.eu

Editorial assistant: Mirari URIARTE

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