



IN BRIEF



MAKING BUDGETS WORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY

IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

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What's the Issue?

Too often, gender issues remain invisible in public policies and budgets, which may be premised on an assumption of gender neutrality. But in reality, policies and budgets may reflect longstanding inequalities, meaning actions with the power to permanently shift the legacy of gender discrimination are not formulated or adequately funded.

Europe and Central Asia is a diverse region, but common to all its countries are persistent gender gaps, whether in labour markets, access to land and economic assets, social services, social protection or decision-making. As long as gender issues remain on the margins of public policies and budgets, governments miss multiple opportunities to accelerate the achievement of gender equality.

This can mean falling short on domestic laws and development goals as well as internationally recognized rights and norms. It prevents the systematic consideration of gender issues, reduces emphasis on the equitable distribution of resources and undercuts the promise of inclusive development.

In some cases, the invisibility of gender in policies and budgets makes discrimination worse. This was the case after the 2008 global financial crisis, when austerity policies failed to factor in the reality that women comprise the majority of public sector employees, and are more dependent on public benefits and services.

The Sustainable Development Goals have presented the world with a transformative vision: achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls by 2030. This aspiration rests in part on significant new public financing. Gender-responsive budgeting has a major role to play in overcoming barriers such as insufficient awareness, inadequate investment and lack of accountability.

Our Solutions

Public policies and budgets are critical tools for countries to work on ending gender discrimination. This obligation is rooted in widely agreed international norms. It stems as well from the principle of accountability to women as equal citizens and providers of public resources, including as taxpayers.

UN Women is the leading global advocate of gender-responsive budgeting. We have supported 65 countries around the world to introduce it, a process that has unleashed billions in new resources, galvanized political momentum and transformed institutional practices to accelerate attainment of gender equality.

Gender-responsive budgeting examines public policies and budgets and generates concrete evidence on whether they support or hinder progress towards gender equality. Where gaps remain, such as in services that do not meet women's needs, resources and policies can be adjusted to close them. The process is integrated within existing budgetary systems—it does not involve a separate budget. It encourages the expanded collection of sex disaggregated data to routinely measure the potentially different impacts of public policy choices on the lives of women and men, and girls and boys. This provides an accurate gauge of whether or not progress towards equality is being made.

In Europe and Central Asia, UN Women's flagship gender-responsive budget programme works with national and local partners to tailor the approach to their priorities. We help cultivate new capacities among public officials, and strengthen the skills of gender equality advocates to effectively influence public decision-making. In all our efforts, we sustain the link to internationally agreed norms, and encourage embedding gender-responsive budgeting in national laws and frameworks, so that it is not a one-off exercise, but a broadly accepted, permanent practice.

Where We Work



How We Make a Difference In Europe and Central Asia

Institutionalizing commitments to gender equality

Gender-responsive budgeting often results in the institutionalization of commitments to gender equality, making implementation more systematic and actionable. In **Turkey**, through gender-responsive budgeting advocated by UN Women, seven municipalities have scaled up gender equality goals, targets and indicators in their local strategic plans—often from a baseline of no references to gender. In the town of Gaziantep, this resulted in a nine-fold increase in resources for gender equality.

Some Turkish municipalities have established units to follow through on commitments made in gender-responsive budgets, helping to ensure they result in actual changes in women's lives. Gaziantep, Eskişehir and Edirne, for example, have new commissions with representatives from all main departments that monitor municipal services for support to gender equality. UN Women has also stimulated the formation of civil society budget watchdog groups that are influential in tracking progress.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, gender assessments of national budget drafts and forecasts have been submitted for annual parliamentary review since 2012. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Development has piloted application of gender-responsive budgeting and initiated reforms to improve maternity benefits.

The 2014 budget circular and instructions in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** feature a new gender-responsive budget module. UN Women-sponsored training has equipped women's groups and parliamentarians with know-how for monitoring its use. **Serbia's** Budget System Law includes gender-responsive budgeting, creating a legal basis for integrating gender equality provisions across state budgets.

In **Moldova**, the leading university in economic studies has developed a gender-responsive budgeting masters' course that will be the first of its kind in the region.

Advancing women's economic empowerment

In a number of countries, gender-responsive budgeting has triggered new investments in women's economic empowerment. **Albania**, for example, following UN Women advocacy with the Council of Ministers, now requires all national ministries to use gender-responsive budgeting. They must also identify specific indicators to routinely assess progress. This has already resulted in increased subsidies and services for women farmers, expanded opportunities for women in vocational training, and extended support for women in financial distress.

Through UN Women's work with municipalities in **Serbia**, two towns have committed to support women's entrepreneurship. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, we helped the Republika Srpska incorporate gender perspectives in selected programmes of the Employment and Social Protection Funds.

* Under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 in all references.



One result of gender-responsive budgeting in the Turkish municipality of Eskişehir is that 700 rural women have access to free cancer screenings.

Giving voice to marginalized women

Budgets, since they draw on public funds, should provide avenues for broad inclusion and engagement—a principle at the heart of gender-responsive budgeting. In **Georgia**, UN Women has encouraged its use in rural areas to empower marginalized women. For the first time, many have a say in local government through women’s committees that regularly meet with local authorities on budget choices. In 2015, the committees surveyed nearly 2,300 local inhabitants to identify 39 public service priorities in five municipalities, such as improved access to drinking water and better schools and roads. This information will shape local budgets in 2016. A similar exercise in 2014 led to nearly half the issues identified ending up in public budgets.

Improving the reach of public services

Public budgets define the scope of public services, many of which are vital to women’s rights and well-being. In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, including gender perspectives in policies and budgets is now mandatory by law, at national and local levels. UN Women backed this step, and helped the Government roll out a strategy to introduce gender-responsive budgeting—the first of its kind in South-east Europe. Among municipalities,

greater visibility of gender issues in programmes and budgets has led to a variety of new measures, such as for more accessible public transport, and care for children and the elderly.

Three municipalities in **Ukraine** have begun introducing gender-responsive budgeting initiatives covering issues such as housing, health, sports and culture. The municipality of Zhytomyr, having analysed the needs of adolescent boys and girls, expanded a network of adolescent clubs that offer a variety of educational, recreational and other services outside school hours, with care to ensure that these appeal to both boys and girls. The city of Komsomolsk extended its “family doctor” service, linking it more closely to the gender and age composition of its population, and recognizing that women and children visit doctors more often and typically require more time for examinations.

In **Albania**, seven municipalities that adopted gender-responsive budgeting now provide enhanced services for older and disabled women. **Turkey’s** city of Eskişehir has extended public transport to women who previously were usually confined at home; Erzincan, another municipality, established a child-care unit in a recreational area.

Reducing violence against women and girls

While the world now has a historic number of laws against gender-based violence, budgets fund actions to prevent it, and protect women and girls from its consequences. In three pilot municipalities of **Kosovo**, UN Women has helped civil society groups working on domestic violence secure municipal funds to extend their services to survivors. The municipalities themselves have developed costed action plans to reduce domestic violence. Implementation has included events to boost public awareness and the establishment of specialized investigation rooms at police stations where survivors feel safe and supported in reporting abuse.

Gender-responsive budgeting programme supporters:

Austrian Development Cooperation, Government of Norway, Government of Spain, Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development, European Union, Sabanci Foundation

Right: UN Women's "Invisible Women" campaign in Albania galvanized attention to gender gaps in budgets for transport, agriculture, tourism, urban planning, social care and sport services.



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BOX 1

Key Results at a Glance

- All ministries in Albania are now required to apply gender-responsive budgeting; seven municipalities provide enhanced services for older and disabled women.
- Resources dedicated to gender equality in one municipality in Turkey have risen nine times.
- Kyrgyzstan's Parliament conducts a gender assessment of the national budget each year.
- Parliamentarians in Bosnia and Herzegovina have the know-how to monitor budgets for gender-responsiveness.
- Serbia's Budget System Law provides a legal basis for integrating gender equality provisions across state budgets.
- Half the priorities identified by local women's committees have ended up in public budgets in five municipalities in Georgia.
- Civil society groups and municipalities in Kosovo have expanded support for survivors of gender-based violence.
- FYR Macedonia's strategy to implement gender-responsive budgeting was the first of its kind in South-east Europe, and has already led to more accessible public transport and care for children and the elderly.
- Three Ukrainian municipalities have introduced gender-responsive budgeting, leading one to expand adolescent clubs with services appealing to girls.
- Moldova's leading university in economic studies has developed the region's first gender-responsive budgeting masters' course.