



**FEMINIST POLICY INDIA**

Transformative Policy and  
Financing for Gender Equality

@policyfeminist

feministpolicy.india@gmail.com

<http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/>

---

## **Press Release on the Union Budget 2023-2024**

### **Union Budget 2023-2024 proves disappointing from a gender lens**

The Feminist Policy Collective expresses its concern about the inadequacy of gender perspective in the Union Budget presented by the Finance Minister on the 1st of February, 2023. Going by the speech of the Honourable Finance Minister and the Economic Survey findings, women's empowerment may have been located as a core interest of budgets. However, this is not translated into real provisions or budgetary allocations. FPC notes that a total of INR 2.2 lakh crores has been allocated for the gender budget this finance year, which constitutes 4.9% of the total budget expenditure.

There are key gender gaps in the Union Budget that need to be urgently addressed - access to comprehensive primary healthcare for all women, access to and quality of education, access to employment opportunities to address women's work force participation, infrastructural provisions for reducing unpaid work for women, representation of diverse women in decision-making at the highest policy levels, as well as the issues of women's safety and gender-based violence which have escalated during and since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has seen an increase of 1.08% only, which is marginal and extremely insufficient and does not lend itself to enhancing substantive equality for women. The SAMBAL sub-scheme comprising older schemes for the protection of women, such as Women's Helplines, One Stop Centres at the District levels, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao - have seen no change in allocation. Another sub scheme SAMARTHYA that focuses on women's empowerment, such as the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) scheme and Swadar Greh and is 2% less than BE 2022-23, though is 33% more compared to RE 2022-23. These schemes are extremely crucial for the overall well being of women and girls. Far more resources are needed to address the persistent gaps in their outreach and support services for women/girl survivors, as well as the need to build robust gender responsive infrastructure and sensitised human resources.

It has been noted that the Safe City Project under the aegis of the Nirbhaya Fund, has an eightfold increase in allocation - from INR 165 crore in RE 2022-23 to INR 1,300 crore in BE 2023-24. But the allocations are now under the Ministry of Home Affairs, with the

Department of Police, rather than Urban Housing and Planning. Further, the allocations for Smart Cities Mission has been lowered by 9% in comparison to RE 2022-23. Far more resources would be needed to build safer and gender inclusive public spaces for diverse women and girls.

FPC notes that there is an increase noted of about 7.75% in the budget for the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, catering to the Dalits, Elderly, Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DTNT) and other marginalised groups. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs too has seen an increased allocation. The allocation to PM Awas Yojana is up by 66% to INR 79,000 crore with focus on Tier 2 and 3 cities. In the last budget the allocation was INR 48,000 crore. This will enable more low cost housing for the urban poor and focus attention on much needed urban reforms and governance for building sustainable cities. There has been increased allocations for the department of secondary education under the PM-SHRI yojana discussed later.

A report published by the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office of Niti Aayog (2021) highlighted that STs, SCs and Muslim communities have lower economic assets in comparison to average households. In light of that, the budget of key Ministries focussing on the empowerment of marginalised communities should have increased substantially. The Ministry of Minority Affairs has seen a major budget cut of 38% in comparison to last year, which will affect essential schemes reaching out to communities of women and girls.

Allocations have also been reduced by INR 90 crores this budget year for People with Disabilities and will seriously impact the implementation of the (Rights of) Persons with Disabilities Act.

The budget has not provided increased allocations to major centrally sponsored schemes (for eg, Anganwadi Services scheme, National Health Mission, National Education Mission, National Livelihood Mission-Ajeevika etc.), that would in turn promote human development, especially of people living on the margins and advance the goals of SDGs. The Budget has also emphasised its commitment to strengthening the DAY Rural Livelihoods Mission that mobilises rural women and advance their economic development programme further.

The total budget for the Union Health Ministry shows an increase of INR 3552 crores only, which means a decline of 2% if we adjust for the effect of inflation. Within this meagre budget, the healthcare allocations for our MPs and central bureaucracy is huge and reflects blatant inequity. Women benefit from having a robust primary healthcare system that is publicly provided, but the Union Budget appears to rely on the failed Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) and promote diversion of public funds to the private sector. PMJAY in Budget Estimates 2021-22 was INR 6400 crore, but in actual terms only INR 3115 crores have been spent. Despite this massive failure, the government allocation has been further increased to INR 7200 crores. It is significant to note that 75% of payments under PMJAY has been to the private sector. The government should immediately scrap PMJAY and instead use these resources to strengthen the public health system. Ayushman Bharat-

Health and Wellness Centers which was announced with such fanfare a few years back has entirely disappeared from the budget lines.

Skilling initiatives have been renamed and older initiatives have been clubbed under it with a meagre allocation for girls and women at INR 2200 crores. There is need for far more to strengthen and build the capacity of girls to enter labour markets in both the digital and non-digital domains. The Pradhan Mantri Schools For Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme that promises to provide schools for rising India and high-quality education under an equitable, inclusive and diverse school environment has been allocated INR 4000 crores, which is what marks the marginal increase in the expenditure rise in school education allocations. However, INR 1200 crores has been reported for girls in GB, presumably mostly for Pragati which is the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) scholarship programme scheme for girls in technical education.

The scheme providing LPG cylinders to poor households has received no new allocations this year, but last year's allocations have been increased in the Revised Estimates. The focus on clean fuels and energy, as well as reducing women's time costs and drudgery, needs to be sustained. The reduced allocations for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) is surprising as women's economic empowerment, women-led development are high on the agenda. Given this the budget needed to increase allocations for employment generating activities as well as focus on sectors/industries by incentivising them for creating mechanisms for improving employment for women - the announcements or allocations are yet to reflect those intentions.

As a collective, we are invested deeply in ensuring issues of inclusion, as articulated by the government, but would argue for far higher budgetary allocations for the most marginalised. At a time of increasing unemployment, declining real rural wages and increasing structural inequalities, especially when the country has not fully recovered from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, far greater emphasis on reaching the last person would have been very useful.