

# Key Recommendations for a Gender Responsive and Inclusive Union Budget

Submission by

**Feminist Policy Collective**



The [Feminist Policy Collective \(FPC\)](#) is an independent network of feminist organisations, individual researchers, academicians and policy advocates who are committed to strengthening gender transformative policies, plans, and budgets in India.

At this time when the Government of India has begun preparing the Annual Union Budget (2022-23), it is imperative that all policies and relief measures be designed using a gender lens and account for the intersectionalities and other vulnerabilities faced by women and girls in the current context to build forward better. The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to reap catastrophic impacts on the Indian economy and society. In addition to a mutating virus and brutal second wave infecting millions across the country, citizens have struggled with not only access to basic healthcare facilities but also all other public services. The states managed the crisis by imposing ‘modified lockdowns’, but the poorest and most vulnerable faced another grim year without livelihoods or social protection – particularly the women and girls. Now when the economy is opening up again, it is important to acknowledge the vulnerabilities faced by specific cohorts of the population and accordingly devise a better build-back.

Despite the number of policy measures launched in this regard over the past two years to protect vulnerable populations from the impacts of the pandemic, the benefits have not accrued to generate greater resilience and economic security. There is an urgent need for governments at all levels to recognize the continued devastation on livelihoods and put transformational measures and structural reforms in place to address the gaps that remain. In this regard, the FPC organized a wide-ranging stakeholder consultation to inform and influence policy priorities for the upcoming Budget 2022-23, from a transformative financing and gender equality perspective. On 12th and 13th November 2021, the FPC held a stakeholder consultation on *Envisioning a Feminist Policy Response to the Pandemic*. The consultation saw participation of over twenty organizations and networks representing a diverse range of issue-based campaigns and rights-based groups.

**The following key priorities and recommendations for the Union Budget 2022-23 have emerged from the discussions:**

## 1 Economic Empowerment

### 1.1 Livelihoods and Dignified Work

- Providing immediate relief to women in poverty through enhancing number of days of work under MGNREGS and expanding the scope of guaranteed employment to urban areas; extending the functioning of Anganwadis to 8 hours to provide creche facilities and linking skill training with industry and service sector needs. [\[1\]](#)

- Implement National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Work (2009) to ensure women workers' protection and safety at workplaces.
- Provide social security coverage for contractual/casual workers.

## 1.2 Agriculture & Forestry

- Allocating budgets and monitoring outcomes for programs to address the yawning gender gaps in resource rights for women farmers on land, water, and appropriate technology are critical for translating statutory rights enshrined in law & policy into implementation.
- Enable registration of women farmers for recognition of women farmers on basis of their work (not only land ownership) for access to entitlements such as Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana - Crop Insurance (PMBFY) and other such Direct Benefit Transfers; at least 50% reserved for women farmers in all agriculture schemes; inputs and investments in agro-ecological farming practices through relevant programs; 200 days under MGNREGS for landless collectives, small and marginal women farmers to support labour for cultivation on their own lands; affordable credit through issuance of kisan credit cards and social security for workers.

## 2 Social Protection

- **Universal Social Protection Coverage** for all marginalized sections prioritizing the socially and economically poorer sections from Socio-Economic Caste Census. Introduce economic relief packages for workers, rural people and others who have lost livelihoods in the pandemic. **Enhance pensions** to Rs 10,000 per month for the elderly, people living with disabilities, transgender persons, single women, those in informal employment or working as farm labour and all frontline workers in the community (ASHA, AWW and MDM workers). [\[2\]](#)
- Budget should be allocated for implementation of Right to Persons with Disability (RPD) Act 2016 - for the of the training of police, judiciary and all Government departments regarding Disability issues as mandated by RPD Act 2016; implementation of the Accessible India campaign, promoting community mental health and expansion of the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation so that more PwDs can get its benefits.
- Budgetary support should be provided for creation of an Equal Opportunity Commission and formulation of the Diversity Index. Right to Persons with Disability (RPD) Rules 2017 also mandates that all the establishments should publish Equal Opportunity Policy. [\[3\]](#)

## 3 Enhancing social capital- health & education; focus on the girl child

### 3.1 Children

- The budget for children must be enhanced to account for at least 5 per cent of the Union Budget<sup>1</sup>. The enhanced budget must be distributed across the various programmes for child protection, development, education and health towards strengthening and universalising existing schemes especially keeping in mind the impact of the pandemic on children's well-being. [\[5\]](#)

### 3.2 Education

- Budgetary allocation for education must be 6% of GDP to bridge the digital divide, ensure free secondary education for girls (Exemption of tuition fees, board examination fees), monetary and non-monetary incentives to students (demand driven scholarship, timely distribution of scholarship money and inflation indexed upward revision of scholarship amount), education scholarships for both pre-matric and post-matric for children in

<sup>1</sup> The share of budget for children (BFC) in the union budget has been continuously declining, from 4.76% in 2012-13 to 2.46 percent in 2021-22 (<https://www.haqrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/budget-for-children-2021-22.pdf>)

families engaged in unclean occupations, free education for transgender children and the children of sex workers to ensure that they do not drop out of school. Access to educational material must be facilitated [\[4\]](#)

### 3.3 Health

- There needs to be a quantum jump in **public expenditure in health care to reflect a commitment to a shift in policy emphasis** away from the private sector. Allocate public expenditure for a rapid expansion of public health infrastructure and human resources in health, including expansion of Health and Wellness Centres.
- **Universalise Access to Comprehensive Healthcare and equalise per capita investment for all citizens;** expand beyond hospitalization to include all out-patient treatment, diagnostics and medicines as permanent provision through guaranteed and assured cashless services.
- **Increase expenditures on Frontline Health Workers.** Regularise ASHA workers with minimum wages (calculated at 21,000 per month) and all social security benefits including pensions and comprehensive insurance coverage. [\[2\]](#)

### 3.4 Nutrition

- Universalise the public distribution system to support all persons (except income tax payers) especially migrant workers, homeless, sex workers, trans people and all vulnerable communities even without ration cards. Expand the PDS to provide millets and other nutritious commodities such as pulses and oil
- Ensure that INR 8000 crore is allocated specifically to Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) so that the state government addition can bring the total budget to 17,000 crore to fulfil National Food Security Act promise for **all** pregnant women; stop disqualifying women on the basis of number of children as contraceptive services failed during the pandemic period [\[2\]](#)

## 4 Ending violence against women

### 4.1 Upgrade eco-system of services for Gender Based Violence

- Ensure that the 728 One Stop Centers (OSCs) approved thus far by MWCD are functional and integrated with 181 Women Helpline and other support services, such as shelters, health and livelihood support. There is under-utilization of funds under the OSC, Helpline schemes, Nirbhaya funds, Swadhar Greh (Shelter Homes) and Ujjwala.
- For optimum utilization, there is need for funds to ensure effective implementation, monitoring and collection of gender disaggregated data for all services.
- Women with Disabilities urgently need specific disability-friendly services for their education, employment, accessibility to short stay homes, court rooms, police stations, etc.
- Effective monitoring of fund for Ujjawala in the border, rural and remote areas (trafficking of women/children). Increase number of Swadhar Grehs and ensure budgets for capacity building and livelihood training.
- This requires fully trained staff, paralegals, counsellors sensitized to address issues of all marginalized communities and survivors of violence. Services must be available to women at sub district levels.

### 4.2 Budget for prevention and education on ending GBV

- This includes addressing gender-based and work-place harassment and violence (under Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act and ratification of ILO C-190).
- For awareness building for the criminal justice system (to be more survivor and disabled-friendly), sensitization of police officers, educators, trial and appellate judges to deal with GBV cases.
- Undertake large scale legal literacy and rights campaigns for diverse women/girls [\[6\]](#)

## 5 Formulating enabling fiscal policy

Following steps need to be considered as a means to achieve the above recommendations.

- Union Budget should substantially reduce the taxes on petroleum products, and the GST rates on a range of products that have important gender implications and bring these under the lowest GST rate (i.e., the zero-rated slab). Allocations to subsidies targeted to the poor need to be increased in order to enhance gender equality. Essentially for Public Distribution System as well as cooking energy which is now out of the reach of even the lower middle class thereby increasing the already high unpaid work burden.
- This can be done without adversely affecting revenue collection by bringing back Wealth Tax and Inheritance Tax and levying a higher rate of Property Tax on higher-end properties. Also, an Excess Profits Tax should be levied on select industries and sectors that have seen high growth during the pandemic (e.g. sections of the pharmaceuticals industry, online retail services, and other digital services such as online communications, etc.). [\[7\]](#)
- In order to make India's tax structure more progressive, long term capital gains (LTCG) tax rate on securities, which is much lower than the income tax rate, also needs to be increased from the present 10 per cent. Besides, the rate structure of LTCG tax too needs to be made more progressive by imposing higher rates (of 15 to 20 per cent) on those making larger capital gains.

## 6 Strengthening GRB from an intersectional perspective

- Strengthen GRB from an intersectional perspective by applying it across the entire policy spectrum at all levels of Government and capacity building, accountability, financial resources and regular monitoring of implementation and reporting.
- In order to strengthen GRB there is a need for adequate (and progressive) budgetary allocations for generation, analysis and timely publishing of disaggregated data in terms of sex and gender identity, age-wise break up of population, geographical location (urban, rural, forest areas and other remote locations), migratory status, ethnicity, class- income and asset ownership, socio-economic profile of farmers, access to natural and financial resources, right to property-house-land-cattle, religion, marital status and number of children, education, health, employment, time use studies for paid and unpaid work, contribution to care economy, intra-household inequalities, exposure to violence, mental and physical disability, and other entitlements as citizens. [\[8\]](#)

## A. ANNEXURE

### Context & Rationale for Recommendations

#### 1. Livelihoods

The severe impact of COVID 19 pandemic on livelihoods has been widely covered. The need to take necessary action to prevent vulnerable groups from falling into destitution has also been highlighted. As per government estimates, the female labour force participation rate was about 16 per cent in the months of April-June 2020 right after the pandemic induced lockdown was imposed in India. This implies that less than 1 in 5 women aged 15 or older had a job or was looking for a job. Further, the State of Working India Report 2021 suggests that about 47 per cent of working women suffered a permanent job loss till December 2020, while the corresponding figure for men was only 7 per cent.”

This gap and the inability to bounce back can largely be explained by the fact that up to 91% of working women are concentrated in the informal sector, mostly at the lower skilled end and also by the increased burden of care during this period. Further, although girls are completing school and tertiary education this does not necessarily equip them for the job market.

It is in the above context that the FPC has the following priority recommendations to enhance livelihoods

- Increase allocations for MGNREGS substantially, while clearing all pending liabilities and arrears. Increase the permissible days of work to at least 150 days per household.
- Provide guaranteed wage employment on the same lines as MGNREGS in urban areas, using the template of schemes that exist in some states such as Odisha.
- Augment public spending on child care with a view to enabling women to access livelihood opportunities. Extend the scope of Anganwadis to work as creches for an 8-hour period to facilitate increased WFPR.
- Equip girls and women with skills which meet the needs of industry and sector, and enable them to meet the challenges of automaton and digitisation.

Recognize AAA (ASHA, Anganwadi and ANM) workers as essential workers and pay them regular salaries and social security benefits.

#### 2. Rationale for FPC Recommendations on Health, Nutrition and Social Protection

The FPC notes with concern the decline in budgets for women-focused sectors: Agriculture, MGNREGA, MSMEs, Education, Nutrition, Crèches, including withdrawal of all subsidies to cooking energy which is surprising in the context of reduction in incomes and massive rise in unpaid work. The Union Budget for 2021-22 unfortunately reduced the outlay for ICDS (AW services) and truncated the budget for maternity benefits that assume greater importance at a time of economic crisis, merging the PMMVY with three other schemes. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) has shown that malnutrition has not improved across the country after 2016: especially high levels of anemia among women. There is a gap already evident in the National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiary list since it is based on a ten-year-

old Census<sup>2</sup> ; therefore, an estimated 90 million people are getting left out, including migrants, homeless, children and the elderly.

The public health system has already been consistently under-resourced with active moves towards privatization; the peripheral health facilities barely function in the absence of skilled human resources. Data showed that the government's health protection scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), had failed to protect the poorest from catastrophic expenses in 2020. Extreme shortage of medical supplies, equipment and personnel has led to unscrupulous practices by the for-profit private sector, including price gouging, hoarding and black-marketing. In rural areas the situation was even more dire as the public health system has been functioning at sub-optimal levels over years of neglect, compelling people to resort to informal providers or expensive private hospitals. Those with non-COVID health conditions such as pregnant women continued to face life-threatening challenges in terms of difficulties in hospital access.

The community frontline workers, such as the Anganwadi Workers, Helpers and ASHA (or SAHIYA or MITANIN) put their own lives at risk during the pandemic during which they were overburdened with tasks, and forced to work without any safety gear even in containment zones and quarantine centres, causing many workers and families to become infected. They have been denied fair wages and social protection including health coverage, maternity benefits and pensions even though they perform the crucial tasks for women's health and nutrition.

The vulnerable households such as Dalits, Adivasis/PVTGs, Muslims, single-women or aged or disabled households and women/transgender sex workers were worse off and urban households fared worse compared to rural families. A survey of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights carried out a survey of 25,000 households across 14 states brought out that only 14% of SC/ST households had been registered under the Ayushman Bharat and less than half of them had been informed by health workers about COVID 19 symptoms and protective measures. Around half the SC/ST households had not received the nutritional food support under the ICDS Scheme. Around 60% or more of the households with old-age pensioners had yet to receive any of the ex-gratia assistance promised.

### 3. Social Justice and Inclusion

Equal Opportunity Commission and measures like Diversity Index and Equal Opportunity Policy will be able to ensure equal opportunity for all sections of the society including all marginalised sections like dalits, tribals, people with disability, transgender people, and women, including single women and commercial sex workers. An institution like Equal Opportunity Commission should have intersectional approach to address the issues of the all types of marginalisations and multiple marginalisations, ensuring equal opportunity for all.

### 4. Education

The pandemic has thrown out millions of children from school and college education. Online education has brought to the fore an important concern of the digital divide that does not allow the majority of poor children, especially girls, to access online education. Dedicated budget for access to online education, for surveys to identify out of school children and for mainstreaming out of school children in the 15-18 age group under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) & National Child Labour Project (NCLP) needs to be increased substantially for the next five years at least. For targeted intervention, budget must be ensured to collect disaggregated re-enrolment data by gender, age, income, caste, ethnicity, disability and intersecting factors to understand the consequences of COVID related school closures. Education must be linked to employment generation and livelihood programmes

---

<sup>2</sup> According to the Census 2011, the population was 1.24 billion therefore the Public Distribution System reaches 830 million; currently the total is 1.38 billion so coverage should be 920 million; which means almost 90 million/9 crore people still left out



## 5. Children

Essential services for children have been suffering from lack of resources. The last budget has seen a decline in real terms for a number of schemes and programmes that directly children, such as school education, mid-day meals and anganwadi services. These have also been disrupted due to the pandemic. As a result, children face learning deficits as well as health and nutrition deficits. Moreover, this has also meant an increased burden of unpaid care work on women along with other issues such as an increase in child marriage among girls and domestic violence. Along with strengthening the existing programmes additional efforts and resources are necessary to make up for these deficits. In doing so, special attention must be paid to marginalised groups including dalits, adivasis, homeless populations, street children, adolescent girls and so on who have been most affected. With the disruption in public services, this must include expansion in childcare services through anganwadi cum creches as well as national creche scheme. Similarly, resources must be allocated so that the mid-day meals and meals in anganwadis can be enriched with eggs, fruits and also adding breakfast. The workers on whose shoulders the delivery of these schemes rest, the ASHAs, anganwadi workers and mid-day meal cooks, must be duly remunerated. The central government's contribution towards their honorarium must be increased and a roadmap be announced for regularising these workers.

## 6. Gender Based Violence

- NITI Aayog (SDG report-2021) noted 62 cases of crimes against women per 1,00,000 population of women. That for every 1,00,000 female population, 20 experienced cruelty/physical violence by husband/his relatives in 2019 (NCRB).<sup>3</sup> NCW reported an increase of 46% in complaints to them on crimes against women during January-August, 2021 against a similar period in 2020, receiving in all 19,953 complaints, up from the 13,618 in 2020.<sup>4</sup> The National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS 5), too points to rising instances of domestic/sexual violence against women – married women, between ages of 18-49, who have ever experienced spousal violence, has more than doubled from 20.6% in 2014-15 to 44.5% in a 5 year time period.<sup>5</sup>
- Women from marginalised communities - dalit, adivasi, minority ethnic and religious groups, women with disabilities, trafficked women/children, survivors of abuse, homeless girls/women, workers from the informal and agricultural sector, sex workers, and from diverse gender and sexual identities (LGBTQI) communities are highly vulnerable and need focused attention and access to services.
- MWCD in their testimony to Parliamentary Committee<sup>6</sup> emphasised the need for increased outlay, and that for the past five years, the Ministry's budget as percentage of GOI budget has remained unchanged at around one per cent only.
- The budget for the schemes on ending violence and provision of services to survivors is as follows:

No.	Scheme	Projected BE 20-21	Allocated BE 20-21
1.	Women helpline	30.00	30.00
2.	One Stop Centre	385	385
3.	Other Schemes Funded from Nirbhaya Fund	80.00	80.00
4.	Swadhar Greh	50.00	50.00

- The Committee noted that women and children in urban and rural India, despite progress made, are largely marginalised, unserved and unprotected, lagging far behind in human and social development. As MWCD is charged

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDG\\_3.0\\_Final\\_04.03.2021\\_Web\\_Spreads.pdf](https://www.niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/SDG_3.0_Final_04.03.2021_Web_Spreads.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/46-rise-in-complaints-of-crimes-against-women-in-2021-up-delhi-top-list-ncw-101631013445931.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/domestic-sexual-violence-rising-in-state-nfhs-data-101637781327387.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/Committee\\_site/Committee\\_File/ReportFile/16/144/326\\_2021\\_3\\_15.pdf](https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/Committee_site/Committee_File/ReportFile/16/144/326_2021_3_15.pdf)

with the responsibility of creating an enabling environment for women and children so as to ensure access to fundamental services, they have therefore recommended, an urgent need to increase the percentage share of MWCD budget to meet these needs.

- The Committee noted that socio-economic and political empowerment of women is a core development goal for a developed and equal society. This goal requires gender equality and sustainable critical policy measures in favour of women. Given various forms of discrimination and instances of violence and abuse they face requires not only women-centric policy formulations but also sustainable framework for protection. And therefore recommends greater allocation, full utilisation and focussed implementation of various schemes related to women and universalization of women empowerment and protection schemes.

## 7. Fiscal Policy

Declining tax- GDP ratio, non-enlargement of the fiscal deficit, reduced revenue collection, and a fall in essential subsidies play a crucial role in reducing gender equality and also ameliorating the disproportionate burden of the pandemic borne by women and girls. Equally important is the composition of tax revenue generated (progressive vs. regressive taxes) to finance such expenditure. Issues or ‘stylised facts’ such as gender differences in paid employment, including formal/informal employment, occupational segregation; gender earnings gaps; the fact that women are more likely to do greater amounts of unpaid work, etc., means that, one of the hidden gender effects of increase in regressive taxes is that it disproportionately disadvantages women as compared with men.

In this context, the Union Budget should substantially reduce the taxes on petroleum products, and the GST rates on a range of products that have important gender implications and bring these under the lowest GST rate (i.e. the zero rated slab). Allocations to subsidies targeted to the poor need to be increased in order to enhance gender equality. Of major importance are those related to the Public Distribution System on which the majority of the poor especially single women are dependent, as well as cooking energy which is now out of the reach of even the lower middle class thereby increasing the already high unpaid work burden. According to data from the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC), the last subsidy pay-out for domestic LPG in the form of Direct benefit transfer (DBT) was made in July 2019. Since then, the retail price of domestic LPG is the same as the basic price plus dealer commission and GST (goods and services tax). As a result, since April 2014, the retail price of LPG has increased by almost 113 per cent from INR 414/cylinder to INR 884.5/cylinder in October 2021. Price support from the government (either through a price discount at the retail end or as DBT) touched a peak of INR 435/cylinder in November 2018 after which it fell to about INR140/cylinder in July 2019. After July 2019, there is no record of LPG subsidy pay-outs from the government. Prices of LPG have continued to be high despite the fall in international price of LPG by 31 per cent between 2013-14 (financial year) and 2020-21. The sharp rise in retail price of LPG between April 2014 and October 2021, is mainly on account of quite removal of subsidies (DBT pay-out fell by over 86 percent from INR275.7 billion in 2015-16 to about INR36.58 billion in 2020-21), which the government does not accept openly.

Recently available data shows that India’s wholesale price inflation (WPI) rose to 14.23 per cent in November 2021, which is the highest in 12 years. This has mainly been on account of higher fuel and food prices. Fuel, being a ‘universal intermediary’, is used for public transport, transportation of goods, as well as agricultural production. Rise in fuel prices, therefore, has an inflationary impact, which in turn, hurts the poor and women the most. It is, therefore, pertinent that the high tax rates imposed on fuel are reduced substantially to counter the rise in international fuel prices in order to ensure that gender inequality does not aggravate further.

With the shift to remote learning during the pandemic, girl children from poorer sections of the population have been worst affected, owing, among other things, to a lack of access to devices such as laptops and smartphones. Laptops and smartphones are taxed at the rate of 18 per cent, i.e. the second highest rate under GST. Girl children’s access to such devices can be improved by making them somewhat more affordable for their families if the tax rates on low-end mobiles



and laptops are reduced. Similarly, there is a need to reduce tax rates on sanitary napkins, alcohol-based sanitisers, disinfectants, etc. While the tax rate on sanitary napkins was reduced from 18 per cent to 12 percent, there is room for further reduction. Likewise, tax rates imposed on alcohol-based sanitisers, disinfectants etc. too should be reduced from the present 18 per cent.

Loss in revenue arising out of these changes can be made up by re-introducing Wealth Tax and Inheritance Tax as well as levying a higher rate of Property Tax on higher-end properties. As women rarely tend to be owners of property due to the patriarchal set up in our country, such taxes would not affect them directly but can help raise revenue from direct taxes, essential for financing public services that women are relatively more dependent on compared to men.

## 8. Strengthening Gender Responsive Budgeting & Improving Accountability

- There is a need for more reliable data for the informal sector, (including sanitation workers) and their households, socio-economic and educational status of different Socio-Religious Communities. The COVID 19 pandemic has shown us that there is need for accurate data on deaths, including age, sex, co morbidities/ health condition disaggregated data, for better planning and an appropriate health system response. NITI Aayog has also recognised the need to strengthen data systems in the country in the light of the Leave No One Behind promise of the SDGs 2030 agenda.
- The entire Union Budget should be subject to scrutiny from a gender lens, and all Union Ministries should be asked to report in the Gender Budget Statement. In order to facilitate this, the format and the purpose of the GBS should be revised so as to make it a lot more oriented towards encouraging the Union Ministries to incorporate gender responsive decisions purposefully in the processes of designing schemes and budgeting for those, instead of adopting a gender lens mostly as an ex-post exercise for reporting.
- The CAG of India has been reviewing the Gender and Child Budget Statements of various States in the recent years. This process should be strengthened by including Performance Audit reviews by the CAG specifically from a gender lens and from a lens of child rights for different States.
- There is need to end discrimination in allocation of resources to different segments of the population. For example, Central Govt employees and Members of Parliament receive health benefits from CGHS at Rs. 9000 per capita whereas the common citizen gets an allocation of Rs 1800 per capita (both Centre and State budgets combined). Similarly, government employees get pension at 50% of last drawn salary indexed to inflation whereas the old age pension for BPL is Rs. 500-1000 per month across different states.
- The budget calculations should be shared with the concerned citizens and they should be invited to join the planning process.