

Union Budget 2026: Women and Marginalised Groups Neglected Once Again

In the Budget Speech for the financial year 2026-27 presented by the Finance Minister, no detailed allocation figures were given for different sectors or ministries. However, once the budget documents became available and the numbers started appearing, it became clear that despite 7.4% economic growth, the revenue collection target for the current year (2025-26) is not being met. The gross revenue target in the Revised Estimates has been reduced from ₹42.70 lakh crore to ₹40.77 lakh crore.

Lower revised expenditure in 2025-26

Along with this, in an effort to keep the fiscal deficit and government debt under control, the expenditure for the current year (2025-26) has been reduced by ₹1 lakh crore in the Revised Estimates compared to the original Budget Estimates.

The combined budget for all centrally sponsored schemes has also been reduced from ₹5.41 lakh crore to ₹4.20 lakh crore in the Revised Estimates for 2025-26.

The downward revision has also affected the budgets of the Ministries of Education, Health, Drinking Water, Rural Development, and Urban Development, whose allocations for 2025-26 have been cut compared to the original estimates. Particularly severe cuts were made in the Jal Shakti Ministry and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs — their budgets have been reduced by 58% and 40% respectively in the revised figures compared to the budget estimates for 2025-26.

Similarly, reductions have also occurred in the revised estimates of the Ministries of Social Justice and Empowerment, Tribal Affairs, Minority Affairs, and Women & Child Development.

Total capital expenditure in 2025-26 has also come down from ₹15.48 lakh crore to ₹14.03 lakh crore in the revised budget.

No boost to social sector in 2026-27

Now, looking at the estimates for 2026-27, gross revenue receipts are projected at around ₹44 lakh crore in 2026-27. However, gross tax revenue as a percentage of GDP is estimated to fall from 12% in the current year to 11.25% in 2026-27. This indicates a reversal of the trend of gradual increase in the tax-to-GDP ratio over the past few years.

The total budget size for 2026-27 is set to be ₹53.47 lakh crore, which is ₹3 lakh crore higher than last year's original budget estimate and about ₹4 lakh crore higher than the revised estimate. The government is also planning to borrow ₹16.63 lakh crore in 2026-27.



However, this significantly larger budget size is not bringing any special benefit to social sectors such as health, education, drinking water, nutrition, rural development, and urban development or for the marginalized sections such as Dalits, tribals, Minorities and women and children.

For example, in 2026-27 compared to 2025-26 BE Ministry of Education budget increased by only 8%, total health budget (including AYUSH) increased by just 6.8% and Rural Development budget increased by only 3.5%, while Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare budget increased by just 2%. The budgets of the Jal Shakti Ministry and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs have actually decreased compared to 2025-26.

Budget for the marginalized groups

The budgets of important ministries for the socially marginalized sections like Social Justice & Empowerment (Dalits, PwD and other destitute populations), Tribal Affairs, Minority Affairs, and Women & Child Development have not seen any significant increase in 2026-27 and is almost same as previous year's allocations for the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Minority Affairs as can be seen in the table below.

Table1: Budget for Ministries/Departments for the marginlaised sections (Rs. Crores)

Ministry/Dept.	2022-23 (BE)	2022-23 (AE)	2023-24 (BE)	2023-24 (AE)	2024-25 (BE)	2024-25 (AE)	2025-26 (BE)	2025-26 (RE)	2026-27 BE	Increase in 2026-27 BE over 2025-26 BE (%)
Dept. of Soc. Justice and Empowerment (MSJE)	11922.51	7413.76	12847.02	8561.37	13000.2	9030.35	13611	11402.74	13687.59	0.56
Dept. of Empowerment of People with Disabilities (MSJE)	1212.42	985.58	1225.15	1142.24	1225.27	1083.9	1275	1291.6	1669.72	30.96
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	8451.92	7273.53	12461.88	7511.64	13000	10131.86	14925.81	10824.18	15421.97	3.32
Ministry of Minority Affairs	5020.5	802.69	3097.6	154.17	3138.24	714.98	3350	2160.45	3400	1.49
Ministry of Women and Child Development	25172.28	23994.05	25448.75	24695.56	26092.19	24842.49	26889.69	24373.91	28183.06	4.81

Source: Union Budget, various years



Only exception is Department of Empowerment of People with Disabilities (MSJE) which saw a 31% increase over the current year's budget estimates. The almost stagnant budgets for the crucial departments catering to the specific needs of the marginalized communities, including women and children, is showing the apathy and indifference towards the empowerment of the marginalized communities.

In the Ministry of Women and Child Development, apart from the ICDS and the PM Poshan, budget for Mission Shakti (including "Sambal" and "Samarthya") has seen negligible increase. The budget for important schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) and PALNA (for creches) are not provided separately but included under the Umbrella scheme, "Samarthya" (which also includes Shakti Sadan, Shakti Niwas, gender budgeting etc.). Here again, we see that there is no increase in the budgetary allocation (₹2521 crores in 2025-26 to ₹2573 in 2026-27), and even these small amounts that were allocated are not being spent, as suggested by the Revised Estimates (₹1678 crores, i.e. only two-thirds of the budget estimate). This would clearly limit the number of women who get maternity entitlements and the number of creches available across the country. Maternity entitlements and creches are important not only for the health and nutrition of the beneficiaries but also contribute to reducing the unpaid care work burdens on women.

Underutilisation of allocated funds

Another worrying trend is year after year underutilization of the allocated budget to these ministries. The budget cuts in the revised budget in 2025-26 is obvious considering that the budget size has also shrank, the lower actual expenditure, however, is a norm for these ministries year after year. The underutilisation by the Ministry of Minority Affairs in last 5 years has been terribly low, bringing the actual expenditure down at just 23% of the budget estimates in the year 2024-25 and even lower in the two preceding years.

Budget for Welfare of SCs and STs

The Statements 10a and 10b of the union budget track the expenditures going towards the empowerment of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively. These statements reporting the Allocations for Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Allocations for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (earlier known as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan and Tribal Sub Plan respectively) provide a clue about the allocations towards the SCs and STs across the ministries of the central government.



Table2: Budget for Welfare of SCs and STs (Rs. Crores)

	2022-23 (BE)	2022-23 (AE)	2023-24 (BE)	2023-24 (AE)	2024-25 (BE)	2024-25 (AE)	2025-26 (BE)	2025-26 (RE)	2026-27 (BE)	Increase in 2026- 27 BE over 2025- 26 BE (%)
Welfare of STs	89265.12	92176.11	119509.87	105176.56	124908.95	105711.31	129249.75	123435.07	141088.6	9.16
Percentage to total schemes budget	5.5	4.85	6.25	4.85	4.85	4.85	4.85	4.85	4.85	--
Welfare of SCs	142342.3 6	133007.9	159147.79	133657.55	165492.72	123372.16	168478.38	161205.1	196400.3 7	16.57
Percentage to total schemes' budget*	8.8	7.00	8.33	7.16	8.18	6.50	7.79	7.84	8.46	--

Source: Union Budget, various years

* Total budget for the all the centrally sponsored schemes and central sector schemes

As the table above suggests the allocations for the Dalit and tribal communities have not shown any increase as percentage of the total schemes' budget of the union government over the years and they remain much lower than their share in the country's population. If anything, the percentage of allocations towards the welfare of SCs and STs to the total scheme budgets have declined slightly since 2022-23.

Also, the allocations towards welfare of SCs and STs also follow the same trend of lower actual expenditure compared to the budget allocations year after year barring one exception.

Gender Responsive Budget

As mentioned above the allocation towards the Ministry of Women and Child Development has increased only by 4.81%. Budget allocations to the important schemes of the Ministry like Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 and umbrella scheme like Mission Shakti (including "Sambal" and "Samarthya") have seen only negligible increase.

The allocations reported in the Gender Budget Statement, however, show the allocation towards the women and girls across the ministries of the central government. In recent years there is improved reporting in the GBS by introducing Part C in the GBS (for the



schemes with lower than 30% allocations and by those ministries/departments which did not report earlier and also by including new schemes/programmes in the GBS which were not included earlier. This has increased the size of gender budget and also the percentage of gender budget in recent years specially in Part B of the GBS, which shows schemes / programmes with 30-99% allocations towards women and girls.

Table 3: Allocations to Gender Budget (Rs. Crores)

	2022-23 (BE)	2022-23 (AE)	2023-24 (BE)	2023-24 (AE)	2024-25 (BE)	2024-25 (AE)	2025-26 (BE)	2025-26 (RE)	2026-27 (BE)
Part A	26772.89	84811.04	88044.21	71912.99	112396.15	67977.73	105535.4	72117.37	107688.42
Part B	144233.58	132612.34	135175.54	297446.34	199762.29	270846.68	326672	303283.52	363412.37
Part C		13909.91	15000	15140.28	15000	20897.82	16821.28	22484.09	29777.94
Grand total	171006.5	231333.29	238219.75	384499.61	327158.44	359722.23	449028.68	397884.98	500878.73
Percentage to total budget	4.33	5.52	5.29	8.65	6.79	7.73	8.86	8.01	9.37

Source: Union Budget, various years

The gender budget allocations in the current year (2025-26) has also seen a decline of 11.58% in the revised budget, bringing the gender budget down to 8.01% in RE from 8.86 percent in 2025-26 BE. There a massive decline of 31% in the Part A (showing schemes /programmes with 100% allocations for women/girls) of the revised GBS compared to the budget estimates for the year 2025-26. This is due to the major budget cuts in all the main schemes reported in Part A of the GBS. Schemes like PMAY Urban and PMAY Urban 2.0 and PMAY Urban 2.0 interest subsidy scheme (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs), Deen Dyal Upadhyay – National Rural Livelihood Mission and PMAY-Gramin (Ministry of Rural Development), and Mission Shakti (Ministry of Women and Child Development) saw a major decline in the revised budget of 2025-26.

In the year 2026-27, the gender budget has increased from Rs. 4.49 lakh crores in 2025-26 BE to Rs. 50.08 lakh crores in 2026-27 BE, an increase of just Rs. 51 thousand crores. In percentage terms the gender budget increased from 8.86% of the total budget in 2025-26 BE to 9.37% in 2026-27 BE. The increase has been mainly in Parts B and C of the GBS. The allocations in Part B increased by 37 thousand crores, while in Part C it increased by 13 thousand crores.

The increase in Part B is manly due to the increased allocations towards VBGRAMG scheme and Jal Jivan Mission. Interestingly the total budget for Jal Jivan Mission has increased only



by Rs. 670 crores (from Rs. 67000 crores in 2025-26 BE to Rs. 67670 crores in 2026-27 BE) but the gender budget component of the Jal Jivan Mission has increased from Rs. 20476 crores in 2025-26 BE to Rs. 33022 crores in 2026-27 BE, showing now increased percentage of JJM being reported as gender budget component. Increased allocations in Part C of the GBS has come mainly from reporting of a new scheme called Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana by the Ministry of Labour and Employment. In Part B also, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region has started reporting this year.

Overall, the GBS is becoming robust by having newer ministries reporting in it and new schemes being added specially in the Parts B and C. Also, some schemes like JJM are now showing increased percentage as gender budget compared to earlier. But the overall allocations towards women and girls and their utilisations seems to not have had any qualitative change.

New announcements for women and girls: The finance minister in her budget speech made very few announcements on new programmes. However, the SHE Marts for self-employed women and the girls hostel in every district are among the two note-worthy and welcome announcements for women and girls in this year's budget speech.

Budget for important schemes

Among important schemes:

Rural Employment Guarantee : ₹96,000 crore has been allocated for the Viksit Bharat Gram Rozgar evam Aajeevika Mission Guarantee Act while MGNREGA has been allocated ₹30,000 crore more than the 2025-26 budget. But whether this amount is sufficient to provide 125 days of employment to all families who want work under the employment guarantee scheme remains to be seen.

Apart from this, most other major centrally sponsored schemes have either seen no increase or have faced cuts:

In rural development: Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya – National Rural Livelihoods Mission, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Gramin have not received any increase.

In agriculture: Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and PM-KISAN Samman Nidhi have not been increased; PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana has been reduced. (Only Krishionnati Yojana saw an increase.)

In urban development: PMAY-Urban, Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban, and AMRUT schemes have seen reductions.



In health: National Health Mission received only a marginal increase; Ayushman Bharat remains almost stagnant.

In education: Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan saw only a small increase; PM SHRI, PM Higher Education Abhiyan, and Post-Matric Scholarship for SCs remain at the same level as 2025-26.

Overall, the budgets of most important ministries and schemes related to social development and weaker sections have either seen only marginal increases, remained stagnant, or — in several cases — faced cuts. This is not good news for the crores of poor and vulnerable people living in rural and urban areas who depend heavily on these schemes and government services.

