

Gender Responsive Budgeting in Australia

A summary for budget participants

What is GRB?

The outcomes and effects of government policies are gendered – just because a policy doesn't mention gender doesn't make it gender neutral. Any area of public policy, such as taxation, housing, urban design, infrastructure investment and health, can impact people differently depending on their gender and other lived experience.

The gendered impact of policies is largely invisible unless a gender lens is used to identify the different outcomes. Considering of the gendered effects of policies can be a powerful means to promote gender equality as well as delivering more efficient policymaking. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), is a form of policy analysis that assesses the budget in terms of its gendered reach and its gendered impact, allowing government to make informed decisions about how to best support women and people of marginalised genders and to combat gender inequality.

Why do we need GRB?

The COVID19 crisis has created unprecedented pressure to address the needs of women and close the gender gap across all areas of federal policy. Climate change will increasingly place pressure on our economic and social structures, putting women and other vulnerable people at risk. We need deep systemic change to our economy and our public policy systems to address systemic biases and make real lasting change for all women and people of marginalised genders.

Australia has a strong history of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and we regularly make international commitmentsⁱ to implement GRB or similar systems. Gender responsive policy development processes (such as GRB) are quickly becoming normalised among national governmentsⁱⁱ and Australia has faced repeated international criticism for our failures to meet our commitments under CEDAW. ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite this, Australia currently has no federal GRB mechanism. Our current gender-unaware approach to policy and budget development leave us unable to identify and capitalise on opportunities to improve women's economic welfare and tap their economic potential. Without knowing the effect of general policy on women, we are working in the dark. Intersectional GRB is a way to lift that darkness and reveal the effects of policy on the lives of more than 51% of the Australian population.

What does GRB look like?

GRB is in use in many countries around the world¹ and there are many GRB models. It is crucial to note that the Women's Economic Security Statement (WESS) is not an adequate form of GRB on its own. The WESS is essentially a list of spending initiatives and programs specifically aimed at women. It does not contain an analysis of how the general budget affects women and it silos 'women's issues' into a specialist document, which creates an

¹ Countries with some form of GRB include Canada, France, UK, India, Austria, South Korea, Belgium, Kenya, Spain, Nepal, Sweden and Pakistan.

impression that policy makers don't need to worry about the effect of general policy measures on women.

ERA recommends that an effective Australian GRB process must:

- **sit at a range of points** across the policy and budget development cycle, not at a single point in the process. Key points are during policy development, at the point of assessing costs and benefits, and in the budget papers themselves;
- be **deeply embedded in the normal routines** of budget and policy development;
- **identify gender biases** and improve awareness of gender among policy and decision makers;
- **identify the resources** needed to achieve equality;
- increase **transparency and accountability** on gender issues;
- establish **measurable indicators** for public reporting;
- incorporate an increasingly sophisticated **intersectional analysis**, and
- involve actors both inside and outside government (such as NGOs and universities) to monitor and evaluate policy. This should include both internal review and review by resourced outside actors such as NGOs and researchers.

It is vital that GRB does not become merely a compliance activity. Training and leadership in this area must stress that GRB is a vital tool for developing better targeted policy and more efficient use of resources.

To be sustainable over the long term, an Australian gender responsive policy process requires:

- active parliamentary support and monitoring,
- a resourced and well-trained public service with oversight and leadership in Cabinet, in Treasury and in all Departments, and
- access to the necessary data for GRB analysis.

ⁱ See for example Australia's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 25% by 2025 G20 agreement, and various Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

ⁱⁱ As of 2017, almost half of OECD countries (15 out of 34 members) had introduced, planned to introduce or were actively considering the introduction of gender budgeting.

ⁱⁱⁱ Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

