



Equality Rights Alliance

Women's Voices for Gender Equality

Gender Budgeting in Australia Position Summary

The COVID19 crisis has created unprecedented pressure to address the needs of women and close the gender gap across all areas of federal policy. Australia has a strong history of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and we regularly make international commitmentsⁱ to implement GRB or similar systems. But while GRB is quickly becoming normalised among national governmentsⁱⁱ and international networks and is being considered by local State governments, our Federal budget and policy development systems have failed to keep up.

Australia currently has no GRB mechanism despite considerable domestic pressure on gender policy, repeated international criticism for our failures to meet our commitments under CEDAWⁱⁱⁱ and a pressing need for efficiency and effective targeting of populations in policy implementation in light of the economic and social effects of COVID-19. Our current gender-blind approaches 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.

In the context of COVID-19 recovery Australia needs policies which make the most of stretched financial resources and which achieve their intended aims for everyone. Without knowing the effect of policy on women, we are working in the dark. GRB is a means to lift that darkness and reveal the effects of policy on the lives of 51% of the Australian population.

To be effective, an 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 costing policies and initiatives, 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 outputs and clearly linked budget allocations for gender-specific initiatives;
- incorporate an increasingly sophisticated intersectional analysis, and
- involve actors both inside and outside government (such as NGOs and universities) to monitor and critique 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.

One possible starting point

The following suggestions are intended to stimulate debate about the best structure for GRB in Australia. ERA has not committed to a single structure but looks forward to working with the Australian public service and other stakeholders to pin down a workable model. As a starting point in Australia, GRB could initially be rolled out across a number of designated policy areas and across the related work done by the Treasury and by the Department of Finance. Initial targets could be a mix of areas traditionally associated with barriers to gender equality (employment, health, education, social services) and non-traditional areas with less clearly appreciated links to gender equality, but which are relevant to Australia's international commitments on gender equality, such as DFAT (for their role in various international commitments and funding programs), the Department of Defence (for their role in implementing the [Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan](#)), and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (for their role in implementing [SDG 2.3](#)).

The Office for Women should be resourced to provide advice to these Departments, but the identified Departments should work together with Treasury and Finance to resource and implement an agreed internal process for gender assessment and accountability, possibly modelled on one of the international examples.

It may be useful to establish an interdepartmental committee to initially drive the development of the system and then to monitor its health. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet could be tasked with driving the initiative, developing (in conjunction with Treasury) standard guidelines for Australian GRB and developing a mechanism for Cabinet oversight of the process.

The Departmental approach should include at a minimum: gender perspectives in resource allocation, gender assessment of impact of existing and new programs, *ex ante* gender impact assessment of all budget measures, a gender needs assessment across policy areas and the identification of data needs and baselines.

Funding and other agreements with States and Territories could be leveraged as an opportunity to ensure consistent data collection of gender disaggregated data across Australian jurisdictions.

A more permanent and Government-wide approach should be developed over a defined period, alongside an increasingly detailed intersectional analysis. The Government-wide approach should be established by legislation and monitored by Parliament to ensure sustainability and proficiency in GRB should be included as a standard element of all public service training to ensure sufficient knowledge base.

An external review and analysis process involving academics, NGOs and community voices should be resourced on an ongoing basis.

Gender Data and Statistics

GRB is not possible without the systematic and properly resourced collection and use of gender statistics.

Strong gender statistics:

- are collected and presented by sex as a primary and overall classification;
- reflect the concerns and lived experiences of women and girls;
- are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives; and
- take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data,
- include data that uncovers different behaviours and experiences among genders (eg: time-use data or data on health outcomes).

Collecting gender disaggregated data requires:

- adequate resourcing of and gender awareness in statistical offices, gender data transparency and availability;
- civil society participation in identifying required datasets; and
- new data standards on sex and gender so that the lived experience of people outside the gender binary are counted and included accurately.

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

