

Gender equality in Australia

Strengthening gender considerations
in policy and budget decisions

HIGHLIGHTS

2023



GENDER EQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

**OVERVIEW**

Gender gaps persist across many areas of Australian life. Although gains have been made in domains such as education, gender inequalities continue to affect economic and social outcomes. A key area for improvement is the labour market, where women engage less in paid work and continue to earn less than men. Addressing gender gaps in Australia will require a concerted and multifaceted approach.

The Australian Government recognises gender equality as a national priority, emphasising its importance for economic prosperity. This priority was endorsed at the Australian Jobs and Skills Summit in September 2022, which brought together employers, governments, and civil society to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the Australian labour market and economy.

To support the advancement of gender equality, the government seeks to embed gender equality considerations in policy and budget decisions. Initial efforts for the Budget in October 2022 included the reintroduction of gender impact assessment for selected budget measures as well as the publication of a revamped Women's Budget Statement. This work is being scaled up, with all budget measures subject to gender analysis for the 2023-24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook and beyond. These efforts, led by the Office for Women, are broadly welcomed by stakeholders, and provide a foundation for developing a whole-of-government approach to improving gender equality.

Furthering its commitment to gender equality, the Government also established a Women's Economic Equality Taskforce that provides independent advice to government; is finalising a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality and an outcomes framework to track progress; and convened a Gender Data Steering Group.

This Review aims to assist the Australian Government in charting its course for achieving better gender equality outcomes. It assesses the governance arrangements for gender equality, including the institutional, legal, and strategic frameworks. It also considers early progress in introducing gender impact assessment and gender budgeting. The Review highlights six key actions to boost Australia's efforts to improve gender equality.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ensure gender impact assessment and gender budgeting are sustained over time:** For gender impact assessment and gender budgeting to have lasting impact, it is crucial that they become embedded in the work of the Australian Government. New legislation providing a definition of gender equality and setting out requirements, roles and responsibilities relating to gender impact assessment will communicate the seriousness of current reforms. Amendments to the Charter of Budget Honesty Act 1998 to provide a legal basis for the Women's Budget Statement will insulate it from economic and political fluctuations. Legal foundations will also bring Australia in line with OECD peers.
- **Establish a Gender Budgeting Steering Group:** Australia should consider forming a high-level group involving central agencies such as the Department of Finance, the Department of the Treasury, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to guide and oversee gender budgeting efforts. It could be convened by the Office for Women and focus on building a practice that brings gender considerations to bear on policy development and budget decisions.
- **Enhance the quality of gender analysis:** The Gender Budgeting Steering Group will need to ensure that systems are in place to validate the quality and depth of gender analysis, so that it can have the necessary impact on policies. As government capacity strengthens, expanding the scope of government decisions to which gender impact assessment must be applied – for example, to include procurement decisions – will help further sensitise the public service to the gender impact of the full range of government actions.
- **Build institutional capacity:** The establishment of gender focal points within each government department and agency can broaden and deepen the understanding of gender equality issues across the Australian Public Service (APS) and will support consistent implementation of reforms. This needs to be accompanied by clear tools and guidance, templates, and targeted training courses for relevant public officials, including those in the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Finance.
- **Develop a Gender Data Action Plan:** Building on the work of the Gender Data Steering Group, this Plan would identify concrete actions to strengthen the availability, awareness and analysis of gender-disaggregated data collected by the government. Poor availability and accessibility of gender-disaggregated data is one of the main obstacles to effective implementation of gender impact assessment and gender budgeting across OECD countries. Strengthening data in relation to a range of population groups will also facilitate the application of an “intersectional lens” to gender impact assessment.
- **Strengthen the Office for Women:** This will better reflect the government's heightened commitment to gender equality and ensure that the Office has the capacity to deliver required reforms. Strengthening the policy co-ordination function of the Office will help mobilise a whole-of-government response to the forthcoming National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality. Enhancing its role in relation to data and research will help provide an evidence base to support well-targeted gender equality policies. Resources should be commensurate with these new functions.

Australia made history as the global pioneer for gender budgeting in the 1980s. The reintroduction of gender budgeting gives it the opportunity to improve the evidence base and impact of budget decisions and regain international leadership in this area. Taken together, these recommendations seek to capitalise on the political and societal momentum for gender equality and embed a whole-of-government approach to closing gender gaps that is enduring and capable of delivering lasting change that benefits all.

A more detailed description of the review findings is available in the full report, available here:

[Gender equality in Australia:
Strengthening gender considerations in policy and budget decisions](#)



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