

Position paper: The introduction of the gender dimension in the public budgets, public procurement contracts and subsidies

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Gender mainstreaming is considered to be one of the most effective approaches to ensure that public policies are taking the gender dimension into account. Nevertheless, we have to assure that this doesn't stay on the theoretical level. The introduction of the gender dimension in the public budgets, public procurement contracts and subsidies is a way of taking *gender mainstreaming* to the practical level. If *gender budgeting* is carried out thoroughly, that is in all the phases of the budgetary cycle, it becomes an effective tool for the execution of *gender mainstreaming*.

What is *gender budgeting*?

The Council of Europe gives the following definition: “*Gender budgeting* is an application of *gender mainstreaming* in the budgetary process. It means a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality.”¹ This integration of the gender dimension should happen in all phases of the budgetary cycle: from the budgetary proposals (ex-ante) over the actual spending (ex-nunc) to the evaluation and control of the actually spent money (ex-post).

But why should governments and public administrations apply *gender budgeting*?

First of all, because it helps obtaining gender equality. Since a budget is a transversal principle (every public administration has a budget), the integration of the gender dimension in the budget is an effective way of including all administrations in the effort of promoting gender sensitivity. Moreover, looking at a budget is one of the most effective ways of getting an overview of the engagements of a public service, since it reflects for which projects and actions money will be set aside. That way, an analysis of the budget from a gender perspective, gives a good overview of the gender awareness of the concerned administration. Are there specific credits for the promotion of equal opportunities? And do the other, regular credits take into account the gender dimension? Is there information about the target public of the proposed policies and do these policies actually reach the entire target public or just one of the sexes? By analysing the budget from the point of view of gender, ineffective and gender blind spending can be avoided.

This leads to a second reason for applying *gender budgeting*, namely that it can lead to a more efficient and effective use of the public resources and can therefore be a tool to achieve so-called ‘good governance’. First of all, applying *gender budgeting* means making an analysis. This can lead to the discovery of inefficiencies and consequently to the improvement of public spending. Secondly, it also increases the transparency of the budgets. An analysis is made of the beneficiaries of the money. The primary focus is of course the gender division of the budgets, but in analysing this, the destination of public money is made clear. Furthermore, the control mechanisms used for gender budgeting, allow for a better supervision of how the money is actually spent.

These last elements show that *gender budgeting* has its place in the management strategy of the three E's. And if the element of gender equality is taken into account, we see that *gender budgeting* is a perfect expression of the increasingly acclaimed new concept of the four E's. The three E's approach measures the value of a strategy or action by its economy, effectiveness and efficiency. The four E's approach adds equity to the parameters of the evaluation.

¹ Council of Europe. 2005. *Gender budgeting. Final report of the Group of specialists on gender budgeting (EG-S-GB)*.

Are there obstacles?

Of course there are obstacles. The first obstacle is that *gender budgeting*, just as any other strategy of approach, is not some sort of magic formula that will instantaneously provide gender aware policies without any effort. It is not an easy and quick solution and it may be a bit difficult to get started at the beginning. That being said, when the concept of *gender budgeting* is gradually getting integrated and better understood by all the actors involved, the process will become easier and more efficient. In the beginning, it will require some extra human and monetary resources to create a stimulating dynamic. People need sensitization and training. But once the process really gets started and comes closer to achieving its goal (i.e. the integration of the gender dimension by all the concerned parties in their own daily work), everything should run more smoothly. So *gender budgeting* is a process, a long term strategy. At the beginning, it will require some efforts and might only have a limited impact. But as time goes by, the efforts needed, will diminish and the impact will increase.

A second obstacle that may be more difficult to overcome, consists of the need for political will. *Gender mainstreaming* and *gender budgeting* require an engagement from the highest level of decision-making. As I just indicated, the process implies, especially at the beginning, some supplementary work. Therefore, it is indispensable that government officials know that the *gender budgeting* process is supported by their superiors. The optimal situation to work in is the one where clear guidelines or even orders are circulated. Here lies an important task for two members of the government. Foremost, it is the Minister in charge of the budget who has to point out the importance of gender sensitive budgets and integrate this in the regular directives concerning the redaction of the budgets. Subsequently, if there is a Minister in charge of equal opportunities, he or she should take up a stimulating role. The two competent administrations should work out directives, tools, etc. It is not easy to overcome this obstacle. If high level officials are not in favour of *gender budgeting*, they will not encourage their staff to apply it. The only solution is to try and convince them of the importance of the process. Therefore, good argumentation is necessary and it is important to try and broaden the scope from gender equality to other topics as good governance. Examples are always a very good instrument when it comes to convincing someone. If necessary, one can also look abroad to find illustrations of good practices.

Concrete applications: subsidies and public procurement contracts.

Two elements of government spending where the gender dimension can quite clearly be integrated are subsidies and public procurement contracts.

A first way in which subsidies can promote the equality of women and men, is of course the attribution of a part of the available grants to projects or organisations that work specifically on equal opportunities and the fight against inequalities. The second way is the integration of the gender dimension in all (relevant) subsidies. The ideal situation is the one that combines these two methods.

In certain cases, it is also possible to integrate the promotion of equality of women and men in the public procurement contracts, more specifically in the selection criteria (exclusion of discriminating companies), the contract award criteria (include gender as a sub-criterion when evaluating the quality of the offer) and the contract performance conditions (obligation to take the gender perspective into account when executing the commissioned tasks)².

Belgian experience.

In Belgium, *gender budgeting* is an obligation on the federal level for it is mentioned in the law on *gender mainstreaming*. Furthermore, this obligation is repeated in the circular letter that contains the guidelines for the budget draft. The Federal Public Services have to attach a “gender note” to their annual budget proposal. This note serves as a tool for performing a

² The Institute for the equality of women and men has developed a brochure on this subject, called “Equal opportunities for women and men in public procurement contracts”. Momentarily, this brochure is only available in Dutch and French, but it is being translated to English. All our available brochures can be downloaded on our website <http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/>.

gender analysis of their budget. The gender note consists of three categories: credits that can be exempted from a gender analysis (e.g. the purchase of furniture), credits concerning specific actions for the promotion of equality (e.g. the salary for a coordinator on gender issues) and the regular credits which have to undergo a gender analysis (e.g. does the budget for drug prevention take into account the differences in drug use of boys and girls?). Currently, the Institute for the equality of women and men is carrying out a sensitization project. The budgets of all the Federal Publics Services have been analysed and gender notes have been composed for all the budgets. Now, we are sitting together with the agents in charge of the budget to explain to them what we have done and how they can compose their own gender note when drafting the next annual budget.