

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

Submission to the Victorian Parliament's Public Accounts & Estimates Committee Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

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Multicultural Centre for Women's Health is a national organisation based in Victoria run by migrant and refugee women and dedicated to migrant and refugee women's health.

About Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH)

This submission has been developed by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), Victoria's state-wide migrant and refugee women's health and wellbeing organisation. This submission applies a feminist and intersectional approach to the issue of Gender Responsive Budgeting, with a specific focus on issues for migrant and refugee women.

MCWH was established in 1978 to promote the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women through advocacy, social action, multilingual education, research and capacity building. MCWH provides research, expert advice, and professional development to key stakeholders on improving the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women across Australia.

MCWH also works directly with migrant and refugee women in the community providing capacity building and multilingual education on women's health and wellbeing, across a wide range of issues and topics, using trained, community-based, bilingual health educators.

MCWH promotes gender equity for all women, with a particular focus on migrant and refugee women, utilising an intersectional and feminist approach. MCWH has expertise on intersectional frameworks and their application to key social issues.

MCWH is a proud member of Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC), the peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women.

Why Gender Responsive Budgeting is important for Victoria

Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is important for the advancement of women's rights, ensuring government allocates resources fairly in ways that enhance gender equity. GRB, particularly when conducted according to an intersectional framework, delivers social benefit by ensuring that the distribution of income, assets and expenditure is shared more equally across the community.

Victoria has led the way nationally on family violence prevention and investment since the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015. With the commitment to full implementation of the RCFV comes an obligation to address gender inequalities across the state. The Victorian Government's *Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement* is a ten-year commitment to ensuring that RCFV reform, including strategies to build gender equity and prevent violence against women, apply equitably to the whole community. Gendered violence will not end until gender inequality ends, which is why addressing the gendered inequalities facing all Victorian women in the economy and State Budget is so important.

With the right intersectional framework, resources and policy commitment, an economic gendered lens should deliver tailored and inclusive policy solutions for enduring financial inequities for all Victorian women and their children.

This submission focuses on the importance of GRB for migrant and refugee women and girls. This submission supports the Gender Equity Victoria (Gen Vic) submission *Back on Track: Gender Responsive Budgeting* (attached), building on the Gen Vic submission to provide additional information on the importance, application and impact of taking an intersectional approach to GRB.

The Need for an Intersectional Approach

An intersectional approach to GRB analyses the ways that systems and structures interact on multiple levels to create gendered financial inequities. It highlights the ways that intersecting forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism combine to create gendered power imbalances and disadvantage, and result in economic marginalisation, exclusion, systemic bias and discrimination.

An intersectional approach is an essential tool to make visible the multiple discrimination that is experienced by migrant and refugee women. While a one-dimensional gender analysis enables an understanding of the ways in which gender inequality and oppression impacts on women, it does not enable visibility of the impact of other important axes of power such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or migration status. A one-dimensional gender analysis is therefore an inadequate tool to fully understand or address the multiple gendered oppressions experienced by the most marginalised women in our community. Inclusive and accurate GRB must be based on an intersectional analysis in order to address the key social and economic policy issues impacting on Victorian women.

The Canadian Government utilises an analytical process called [GBA+](#) to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people experience government policies, programs and initiatives. GBA+ analysis is used to advance gender equity in Canada in a way that is multi-dimensional and inclusive of women and non-binary people from marginalised communities such as those from migrant and refugee communities. GBA+ has been applied to analysis of financial policy in Canada and could also be a useful resource in the Victorian context.

Gender responsive budgeting and migrant and refugee women and girls

The Victorian female population is highly culturally and linguistically diverse. Almost half of the female population (49%) is either born overseas or has one or both parents born overseas. Approximately 886,000 women and girls have migrated to Victoria from a main non-English speaking country (MNESC), making up 29% of the Victorian female population. Population projections estimate a future growth of 44,000 MNESC-born women and girls per year.

All Victorian policy, including GRB, must take account of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population. In addition, it must recognise that migrant women and girls experience inequity and disadvantage due to intersecting discrimination, resulting in poorer outcomes in areas such as employment, health and family violence.

Higher unemployment rate

Overseas born women generally have a higher unemployment rate than women born in Australia and than men born overseas. In addition, visa category makes an important difference in migrant women's capacity to participate in employment. In November 2016 the unemployment rate of migrant women with permanent residency was 12.2%, and those with temporary visas was 11%, compared with Australian born women at 4.5%. Migrant men with permanent residency had a 5.8% unemployment rate and men on temporary visas had a rate of 7.8%.

Lower full-time employment rate

In November 2016 migrant men were more likely to be employed full time than migrant women: among employed permanent visa holders, 82% of men were employed full time compared with 66% of women; and 67% of employed male temporary residents were employed full time compared with 55% of female temporary residents.

Lower labour force participation

Overseas born women have a lower labour force participation rate than women born in Australia and than men born overseas. In November 2016 the labour force participation rate of migrant women with permanent residency was 58% and for women on temporary visas it was 54%, compared with Australian born women at 66%. Men on permanent visas participated at a rate of 86% and for men on temporary visas the rate was 74%.

Health outcomes

Available research shows that immigrant and refugee women are:

- at a greater risk of suffering poorer maternal and child health outcomes.
- less likely than Australian-born women to have adequate information and familiarity with modern contraceptive methods.
- at greater risk of contracting a sexually transmitted condition (such as HIV and hepatitis B), especially migrant women who are from countries where the condition has a high prevalence.
- less likely to use health and social/support services. (It is important to note that low access to prevention programs leads to higher representation among crisis and acute service-users).
- less likely to have access to evidence-based and culturally relevant information which will enable them to make decisions about their health.

Some key indicators of migrant women's poorer access to the health system in Australia are:

- lower rates of access to antenatal care in the first trimester;
- higher rates of stillbirth;
- higher rates of poor perinatal mental health;
- higher rates of gestational diabetes.

(See the attached MCWH *Sexual and Reproductive Health Data Report 2016* for more information).

Violence against women

While there is limited data available about the prevalence of violence against migrant and refugee women, research indicates that migrant and refugee women, particularly those who are newly-arrived, have precarious visa status, are socially isolated and/or do not speak English, are more vulnerable to family violence.

In addition, migrant and refugee women tend to have poorer access to family violence services at an early point and are therefore over-represented in crisis services. In addition, they have fewer support options and tend to fall through gaps in the system. It is not yet clear whether the RCFV reforms have made a quantifiable improvement to migrant and refugee women's access to family violence support in Victoria.

Migrant and refugee women experience different forms of family violence, such as immigration-related threats and coercion, and where they experience the same forms of violence as non-migrant women, they experience the violence differently and it has different impacts. Migrant and refugee women are particularly susceptible to financial abuse.

(See the attached *ASPIRE Compass Summary Report* and the *ASPIRE Financial Abuse Fact Sheet*).

Conclusion

Effective and accurate GRB will be based on an intersectional and feminist framework that recognises the intersecting discrimination experienced by migrant and refugee women, and which results in poorer outcomes in employment, health and family violence. Migrant and refugee

women's poorer outcomes in employment, health and family violence can be improved through gender equity policies that take into account the multiple policy areas that affect their lives. GRB must include those multiple policy areas in its analysis.

Key recommendations

As a member of Gender Equity Victoria, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health supports in full the recommendations put forward by GEN VIC in their Back on Track: Gender Responsive Budgeting Submission. MCWH's additional recommendations are highlighted in purple font:

Recommendation 1

That the Victorian Government adopt global best practice in the establishment, implementation and resourcing of gender responsive budgeting in the State of Victoria.

This should include a method for conducting an intersectional analysis such as the GBA+ analysis conducted by the Canadian government.

Recommendation 2

That the Department of Treasury & Finance publish annual data on the gender and diversity make up of the department, including the representation of women on the boards of its agencies, affiliates and entities, disaggregated utilising an intersectional approach.

Recommendation 3

That the Department of Treasury and Finance establish a specialist gender economics unit to plan, implement and evaluate gender responsive budgeting, to be supported by the Office of Women's Equality. The gender economics unit should:

- be structured, as other Treasury units are, to withstand changes of government.
- ensure all economic and fiscal data is collected in a disaggregated way to measure the differential impacts of the Victorian Budget on women and gender diverse people, utilising an intersectional approach.
- lead whole-of-government gender analysis across the budget cycle, working closely with the Office of Women, to develop Gender Equality Budget Statements, with high level intersectional analysis of the impact of annual budget decisions, outputs and asset investments on Victorian women and gender diverse people.

Recommendation 4

That the Department of Treasury & Finance support the establishment of a Gender Equality Budget Group, bringing together civil society organisations, gender economic experts within government and the academy to inform the development of gender responsive budgeting in Victoria, including greater transparency, accountability and analysis. This group may also assist in the evaluation and monitoring of the project, by independently assessing the effectiveness of the GRB approach on gender equity in the State.

The Gender Equality Budget Group should include representatives of feminist migrant women's organisations as well as members who have expertise in applying an intersectional approach to GRB. Membership of the Group should be supported financially, and consideration should be given to the need to build capacity of these representative organisations so that they can actively participate. Membership of the Group should also include people who have expertise in how GRB can be effectively applied to the specific social, economic and political contexts in which migrant and refugee women live their lives.

Attachments:

1. *Gender Equity Victoria's Back on Track, Gender Responsive Budgeting Submission 2019.*
2. *MCWH Sexual and Reproductive Health Data Report 2016.*
3. *ASPIRE Compass Summary Report.*
4. *ASPIRE Financial Abuse Fact Sheet.*

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