

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

Melbourne—Monday, 11 October 2021

MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Ms Soo-Lin Quek, Executive Manager, Knowledge, Advocacy and Service Innovation, and

Ms Sobur Dhieu, Policy Intern, Centre for Multicultural Youth.

The CHAIR: I declare open these hearings of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging and any elders from other communities who may be joining with us here today.

Welcome to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting.

We note that members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards. We ask that people turn mobile telephones to silent.

For the record, we advise that all evidence taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this forum, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for them to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

We welcome the Centre for Multicultural Youth. We invite you to make an 8-minute opening statement to the committee and then this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you for joining us today, and sorry for the delay in our start.

Ms QUEK: Thank you for inviting us, and there are two of us today—myself and Sobur, who you see on your screen. I would like to open up by thanking you for the opportunity to speak to you all about multicultural young women's issues. I would also like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this country where we are based and pay our respects to the elders past and present and emerging leaders and to acknowledge their continuing connection to lands in the community.

Very broadly, the Centre for Multicultural Youth is an organisation that works with multicultural young people right across Victoria, and our vision is to ensure that multicultural young people are empowered, connected and influential Australians. I would like to start by acknowledging too the work the state government has done to progress women's equity through annual gender equality budget statements. That is fantastic to see because, as you all know, gender-neutral approaches often hide inequities of gender. However, having said that, gender equality budget statements also do hide the specific and compounded inequities of young women, much less multicultural young women, who are often invisible in the work that they do to lift their families and their communities out of disadvantage, and this is a scenario we often see right across the work we do in the Centre for Multicultural Youth. The enormous work that multicultural young women do, their volunteer work on top of their school and/or study, and often they are doing all three at the same time. It is just phenomenal, and in a minute I will hand you over to Sobur. But in order to bring multicultural young women into a more level playing field, gender responsive budgeting needs to not only be gender inclusive but also age inclusive in terms of young people and, most importantly for us, culturally inclusive. Their often invisible work needs to be recognised through adequate funding or adequate recognition through investments in their voluntary as well as paid work and schoolwork, and that is not often visible at all in any gender statements.

Multicultural young women often shoulder enormous expectations, where they carry obligations of their family and their communities as daughters and as young women, as well as the expectation that they also contribute to the community needs and the expectations that they do well in school and that they do get a job that pays well. To give you a really good idea of what happens in the lives of multicultural young women I would like to hand over to Sobur, who can speak to you about her experience as a young woman in a multicultural community.

Ms DHIEU: Thank you, Soo-Lin, and thank you, state government, for this opportunity to speak before you. I would just like to say that I echo what Soo-Lin has said. Women from multicultural communities do face

higher expectations of providing care for younger siblings, and I guess that has been exacerbated over the course of the pandemic. This is really challenging because men do not often face these expectations to contribute to housework and unpaid care for siblings or parents, so it creates a massive disadvantage in terms of our opportunities. Young women also engage in a lot of unpaid voluntary work in their communities. This is very important work that should not be overlooked. I guess this is something that holds the community together.

To give you an idea, we take part in voluntary homework clubs. I volunteer at my local church for the South Sudanese community, where I educate some of the younger siblings and community members there. I think it is really important work that does not often get recognised in terms of any remuneration, any payment for travelling or basically how much effort it takes to do these unpaid voluntary experiences. I think it is important because in our current pandemic there is a lot of precarious employment or underemployment, so young women have to often face these economic caring responsibilities, yet they face the pressure of also providing for their family in real terms by getting a job. It is really difficult to juggle. Young women often support other young women through volunteering experiences, and I guess the government should ensure that community organisations are well equipped to meet the needs of young women. So, for example, they often attend homework clubs, which are really fruitful for our educational progress, and this often leads to employment opportunities. Thank you.

Ms QUEK: I would like to end our presentation by saying that with any budgeting statements I think there need to be very clear outcomes and measurable outcomes for multicultural young women, and of course on top of that really clear and transparent reporting back to communities on progress or on initiatives and also on how budgets are expended and what areas they are expended in. With that I would like to end our presentation and perhaps open up for any questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I invite committee members to indicate who would like to go first. Sam.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Chair. And thanks for your presentation today. You have already pointed out the gender equality budget statement, but I am just wondering if you are aware of any analysis of outcomes of existing funding—whether that is done prior to the funding or after the inclusion of the program, whether there is any existing analysis that is being done?

Ms QUEK: Sorry, just to help me get to your answer, are you asking for any analysis that is around for any budget statements? Is that right?

Mr HIBBINS: Well, I am just wondering, in terms of any existing funding that is provided to programs for young people from a multicultural background, whether you are aware of any analysis that is already being done, whether that is prior to the funding being handed out or after the program has concluded?

Ms QUEK: Yes. I think with any state government funding to community organisations there are always very clear KPIs and outputs that need to be measured and accounted for. So in terms of my experience I think with any funding that goes to multicultural communities there are those reporting from community organisations back to the departments on how we spend the money. I think a lot of programs, for instance, are not youth-specific programs. You may have a community organisation—let us say, if I take Sobur as an example. Her community is a South Sudanese community. Money may go to a community organisation, and the money is spent according to those KPIs, but if those KPIs do not highlight or have very specific KPIs around young women often the case is that the money may not be spent on young women but be spent on the community generally. So that is why I am saying I think there need to be very clear, measurable outputs in terms of any funding or budgets around multicultural young women and that they be very specific about multicultural young women.

Mr HIBBINS: Terrific. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Thank you very much, and thank you so much for your presentation today. We do know that young people are over-represented in low-paid and insecure work and that young women in particular are most likely to experience gendered violence and housing insecurity. I was hoping you would be able to outline for us

how government implementation of gender responsive budgeting would enable those sorts of challenges to be recognised and then reflected in government priorities.

Ms QUEK: Yes. Thank you. I acknowledge that in the last budget statement there was a section on family violence, and that is fantastic because family violence is one of the most insidious, I would say, diseases, in that sense, that we have in the community. I think a lot of what has been committed to in the last state budget is incredibly important and valuable. However, as with a lot of initiatives, what tends to happen is that if there is no mention of or there is no specific emphasis given to multicultural communities, often the budget expenditure will be—what we would call in that sense—just mainstream, right across. And what we find in our experience is that organisations—it is not that they do it deliberately; I think sometimes a lot of organisations do it unconsciously—do not target their funding, for example, to multicultural communities.

So one of the issues that we have in our centre at the moment—actually, funny you raised it because we are actually trying to put up a strategy on family violence and implications for adolescents in multicultural communities, because there is no research at the moment, or there is not a lot of very targeted funding around family violence that speaks to multicultural young people. So that is a big gap for us in terms of the sector. So in that sense a lot of those budget statements are fantastic, but I think there has to be some specificity within that that looks at the lives of multicultural young people, being very clear about how that money is going to be used—let us say, in the family violence area—and targeted towards multicultural young women and young men. And I think that is one of the gaps at the moment: there is no specific targeting of those kinds of initiatives to multicultural young people.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Chair, do I have time to squeeze in one more?

The CHAIR: Follow up and then I will pass to Bev McArthur.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. Thank you very much for that. We know that women and girls from migrant backgrounds experience poorer employment and health outcomes as well. With half of Victorians either born overseas or having a parent born overseas, it is important that government policy obviously responds to the diversity of our population. How can the Victorian government embed an intersectional lens in the implementation of gender responsive budgeting, and what benefits would that deliver?

Ms QUEK: I think with any gender responsive budgeting, it is just putting on another lens or a couple of lenses in the intersections. It is making sure that if we take, let us say—you are absolutely right, health and mental health is a big one, especially in the pandemic, and that really highlights mental health issues for multicultural young people and young women specifically. I would say if there are investments in funding for mental health issues, then whoever holds the funding—for example, if it is DHS as the department that is responsible for distributing the funding across communities, that department has a very clear culturally inclusive lens. So it is not just mainstreaming to broadly young people—there are issues that are very particular to multicultural young people, and making sure that funding really highlights multicultural young people through the KPIs for the funding outputs and the reporting around those funding outputs. So, for instance, if there is youth-led work—as we have seen with the royal commission into mental health, it called for the lived experiences of communities to lead some of the work. If that is the case, whatever funding that goes out needs to have a multicultural youth perspective in terms of youth-led lived experience initiatives and it needs to be very clearly specified in those KPIs. I think that is one way.

Sometimes it is a very blunt instrument because sometimes it just forces people to do it rather than them fully understanding why they need to do it, but I think it is a step towards getting some intersectionality into funding agreements so that it does not just go out as all young people. Sometimes when it goes out to all young people it does not hit any kind of specific groups that you want to hit. So I think it goes back to using that instrument, that funding instrument, for making sure that any funding that is disseminated really thinks through carefully how it is targeting particular vulnerable communities, including multicultural young people. How to make it accountable is again going back to clear reporting. The benefits of it would be if there is clear targeting of investments, then I think we have very clear reporting on it, and if that reporting does come through, it is something that can be shared with the community—and again not using reporting as just a blunt instrument but making sure that reporting is accountable to the money that is spent but also accountable back to communities that are affected by, let us say, mental health, and particularly young women. I think for young women to see that their issues and their concerns are taken seriously, that really acknowledges and recognises what they are

doing in the communities but is also a great boost for them to go, 'Great, the government can see the struggles that I'm facing'. Then it gives them the energy to kind of keep going and to keep fighting the good fight in that sense too.

Mr MAAS: Thanks, Ms Quek. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Maas. Bev McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Soo-Lin and Sobur, for appearing today. I understand your organisation was recently given a \$300 000 budget from the state government to deliver training in inclusion and diversity for sporting organisations, regional sports assemblies and local sporting clubs across the state. Are you able to tell us how that money is being spent and if there are any outcomes that we could look towards?

Ms QUEK: Thank you. Yes. That \$300 000 is for what we now call the program Centre for Multicultural Sport, and it is \$300 000 over 18 months to support the sports sector in inclusive practices, so it is working with state sporting associations and clubs to support them in inclusive work. That culturally inclusive work will also have an intersection of young women in there. It is something that young women very clearly said to us before we got the money that they wanted gender-specific activities but also very clearly said to us that our inclusion work in terms of culturally inclusivity needs to also have a gendered lens to it.

The money—we are just about to kickstart that program. That money will work with, let us say, Football Victoria, Basketball Victoria and so on to work alongside them and take a deep dive into the inclusion work. I think a lot of sports have got a language of inclusion now, but I think once you kind of scratch a little bit of the surface around inclusion language a lot of sports struggle to look at how to put that into practice. So that money is to walk alongside them and take a deep dive into what is happening in each of the sports, but also then working with them to develop an action plan so that they can have very clear milestones and gains, and we will mentor, coach and support them with resources, including training and other types of resources that we have developed over the last while, to really embed inclusive practice, including gender-inclusive practices.

One of the things, for example, in that work we are doing is we have already identified five sports within Victoria that have agreed to come on board with us to look at anti-racism work, and we have also partnered with the Koorie Heritage Trust to work with the five sports and us to work out what is happening in those sports, what is not working for them in terms of anti-racist practice and what we need to put in place with them. So it is not just multicultural communities but also looking at what is happening in those sports around Indigenous or First Nations communities. It is not easy work in that sense. It will take quite a period of time—I would say at least the first three months—to really unpack what it means for each of the sports and then working with them over the medium to long-term period to really bed down anti-racist practice, including with that I would say a lot of young woman would say, 'I don't participate in sports not just because of the racism but because also about my gender'. So how do we look at anti-racism practices that also have a gendered lens to them? That is where the \$300 000 is going towards in the next 18 months or so.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Richards.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you so much for your evidence so far. I just wanted to acknowledge that it is the International Day of the Girl Child, so it is terrific to have your insights on such an auspicious day. I am interested in understanding a little bit about the gender gaps. We know that a lot of gender gaps start in childhood and there are different opportunities and expectations and gendered norms that arise in childhood and throughout adolescence. I am also very conscious that barriers to girls' equal participation in certain activities during their younger years can really compound into significant gender gaps in opportunities later in life. How would the implementation of gender responsive budgeting assist the government to understand the impact of different expenditures? I am also interested in, you know, you have just been speaking a bit about sport—the construction of things like sporting facilities, for example, and how those different opportunities are generated for boys and girls and why this is important.

Ms DHIEU: If I could speak on that one. I think it is really important that these gender responsive budgeting practices meet young girls where they are, because I feel like a lot of the gender gaps do arise out of the home and they are just inherited from cultural norms—so young women are not always permitted to play sports, and that is why we have such low participation rates in multiple cultures. If there were sporting programs that met

young girls while they were still at school and they were accessible and culturally relevant and their parents were brought on board, and there was a massive campaign to change the mentality and the cultural approach as well because it is not always a top-down approach. I think it is working with the communities to understand those stigmas and navigating those cultural tensions. I think those place-based interventions with gender responsive budgeting would be really helpful.

In terms of education and employment, the same thing. I feel like a lot of young women do find their early career opportunities through volunteering. I know for me it is through my work with the CMY and other community members that I was able to get my first step in the door. If there were more opportunities like that so that young women could actually gain an employment trajectory out of just volunteering experiences, which they are already expected to do from a cultural perspective, I think that would really help them and would help different cultures understand the importance of paid work for women, because I still think that although we are working there, we are not there yet. I think the formation of a committee with multicultural young women on a panel or something like that or a reporting committee or any sort of board that provides that accountability and that transparency and also provides those opportunities for them to voice their opinions and to have actual input before these policies are actually implemented would be really helpful. Meeting young women where they are at and not being afraid to challenge those cultural norms that do perpetuate a lot of the inequality that they later experience in life—that is how I would answer that.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you so much. That is really terrific and helpful. Is this the only committee that actually has a girl child on the committee, on Tim Richardson's lap today, to coincide with the international day? That is terrific. Thanks.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Richards. Is there another member of the opposition who would like to ask a question?

Mr D O'BRIEN: My question got answered, Chair, so I am good. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Brien. Are there any further questions? We have a few minutes if anyone has any others. Did you raise your hand, Ms Taylor? No. Bev, you didn't have anything else?

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Just following up Sobur, you mentioned that young women are doing all the volunteering. Are you telling us there is a gap in the cultural communities, where young men or men do not volunteer?

Ms DHIEU: I think absolutely. I think a lot of the reasons why young women are more likely to volunteer is because the nature of volunteering speaks to those gendered norms around caring and organising stuff for children or for community. I think that young women naturally feel obligated. I know with my South Sudanese community women do all of the shopping for cultural events. They do all the organising, they do all the training, they do all the pick-ups, and men just come there. It is important that men and women are both present in these volunteering capacities, but young women find themselves doing it more because it is that cultural expectation that women work and show up and provide for their community, so I think there is definitely a gender gap. I guess this might be going a little bit specific, but within the South Sudanese community it is very apparent that young women are the ones that are holding the culture together—the older women as well. I think it is something that really should be investigated more. A lot of young men are losing touch with their culture at a much higher rate, which is something that is quite concerning for the future of our own communities as well. So yes, I think there is definitely a volunteering gap that arises from those gendered norms.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. If there are no further questions, we will conclude this session with the Centre for Multicultural Youth. We thank you very much for the work you do—the work, I am sure, your organisation has been busily doing throughout this pandemic as well—and for your contribution here today. You will be provided with copies of the transcript to check, and they will be followed up with you. Thank you very much to the Centre for Multicultural Youth for your time today.

Witnesses withdrew.