

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

WITNESS (*via videoconference*)

Mr Ignacio Méndez Cortegano, Secretary-General of Finance, Regional Ministry for Finance and European Funding, Andalusia, Spain (*via Spanish interpreter*).

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging.

We welcome on this occasion the Regional Ministry for Finance and European Funding from Andalusia in Spain.

We note that members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards.

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.

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We invite you to make an 8-minute opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. I will hand over to our interpreter, Maria. Thank you.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Good morning. It is a pleasure for me to be here with all of you today in this hearing about how we apply gender responsive budgeting.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: The autonomous community of Andalusia is one of the most populated regions in Spain with approximately 8.5 million inhabitants, and with a budget of more than €40 billion, with also a GDP of more than €170 billion. The Andalusian government believes that because of the situation post pandemic it makes more sense to insist on achieving equality between men and women. We also understand that achieving gender equality is one of the principles that is linked to obtaining economic growth and better quality of life.

The strategy began in 2003 by establishing two fundamental principles. The first one is the Commission for the Impact of Gender in Budgets, which is the principal aspect of it. This commission that I was mentioning, it has two representatives, a man and a woman, from each council regional ministry and also two representatives of the women's institute and another of the statistics institute of Andalusia. The Andalusian Institute for Women is the one that establishes the references for the gender equality principles, and the statistics institute of Andalusia is the one that develops all of the activities to obtain diagnostics about the public policy when it comes to gender.

The gender impact commission is the one that leads, implements and coordinates the strategy for this gender responsive budget. That commission is led by the General Secretary of Finance, and that is a main characteristic of the Andalusian strategy. The coordination and the follow-up of the gender responsive budgeting is in the Ministry of Treasury and European Funding. The second element is the report of gender impact, which accompanies annually the budget of the autonomous community. Another element is a program that we call G+, and it is a classification for the budgeting programs regarding the impact and relevance that it has in gender.

The last phase of the strategy is the audits: budget auditing and gender auditing. These audits will value the degree of integration of those strategies in the making of the public budgeting. Additionally, this strategy has different elements, which are: training, raising awareness and promotion of these measurements.

To finish, I will just do a summary of the main elements. The first one is to institutionalise all of the gender equality in all of the policies of the budget. The second one is to produce a cultural change in the administrative staff of the regional government. And all of that is linked into the political cycle of planning, execution and budgetary evaluation. With that, I end my presentation, and I am available for any questions or doubts or any inquiries that you might have about the information.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr O'Brien, Deputy Chair.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Thank you, Señor. Can I ask: what has been your most significant success in gender equality and how has it been measured?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: The most significant success that we have had is that, in the process of elaborating and evaluating the budget, gender equality is an essential part of the report of gender impact. It is an essential thing that is there. Every public policy has indicators and has objectives that will be measuring it—every one of them. In concrete, I can give you an example of family aspects; for example, balancing family life between parents—how much time each of them dedicates today care and education.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Gracias.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you very much for your time. I am interested in understanding the challenges in implementing gender responsive budgeting, especially during times of an emergency and currently with the consequences of the pandemic.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: As I said before in the presentation, we understand that the effects of the pandemic are evidently different between men and women.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Precisely, in the month of November we will organise an international conference where we will discuss the effects of COVID and the pandemic and the differences between men and women. And precisely in the making of the budget in, I guess, article 22 we are introducing indicators that will be measuring that exact impact post COVID, post pandemic, and how that affects gender equality.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Bev McArthur.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for being with us today. You have been operating for 18 years. Do you think you will be out of a job soon?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: No, the Secretary-General of Finance has a lot of work to do.

Mrs McARTHUR: A second question: how have you gone in achieving gender equality in rural areas?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Without doubt Andalusia is a big community. It is very well spread and it is very extensive. It is actually bigger than 13 states of the European Union. We have areas that are dealing with problems of being unpopulated. In those areas we measure special indicators. In the rural areas we impose fiscal measurements. Regarding that, we also deal with education and with health services so that we can provide equal opportunities for all the territories of Andalusia, whether they are urban or rural.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Maas.

Mr MAAS: Muchas gracias, Señor Méndez. I was wondering if you could inform the committee: who holds the key responsibility for driving gender responsive budgeting through the decision-making processes?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: It is me, the Secretary-General, and the commission. It is the gender impact commission, which I am president of, being the Secretary-General of Finance.

Mr MAAS: And is that driven within government itself?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: The gender impact commission is an organisation that is institutionalised and it was created by law. It has members from all of the ministerial departments, women and men, and also two members from the national women's institute and the national statistics institute.

Mr MAAS: Thank you. I just want to know the sort of work that is being done to incorporate the decisions through the various ministries into the gender responsive budgeting framework, and what have the challenges been?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: The fact that we have an institutionalised framework, like a legal framework, is the main success of the Andalusian model. So all of the regional ministries must by necessity define in their budget programs a series of indicators and objectives that have to do with gender. And then they are assessed, they are evaluated, after that by the gender audience.

Mr MAAS: That is great.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: I also wanted to say that there is a team of five people in the general ministry of finance that manage all of the bureaucracy and administrative processes.

Mr MAAS: Sí, Señor. Gracias.

The CHAIR: Mr Hibbins, do you have a question?

Mr HIBBINS: Thanks, Chair. Just in regard to the commission, you indicated that it is set up by legislation or through legislation. Does it have a budget allocation to allow it to do its work?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: There is not a specific budget. It is covered by the ordinary budgets of the general ministry of finance and every ministry. Precisely this year we have audited the direct cost of the GRB process. It is only €100 000 a year.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay, thank you. And then in terms of working within the departments to achieve the outcomes that the commission is looking for, how would you describe the relationships with other departments?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Well, the relationships with the commission are the same way that the relationships are between the Secretary-General of Finance and the rest of the ministry. They are often tense—there are moments of tension. But the last word will always be in the ministry of finance, because they are the ones leading the initiative.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you. And just finally, if I may, Chair, just in terms of the reports that the commission publishes, are they all made public to the wider public, or are they internal documents?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Yes, they are available for the public, and we also have them in English.

Mr HIBBINS: Terrific. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Taylor.

Ms TAYLOR: Hello, and thank you for being on the hearing today.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Thank you very much.

Ms TAYLOR: Just thinking about before, you were reflecting on rural areas and collecting data and comparisons. I just want to dig a bit deeper but on a broader level. If you are thinking about access to detailed and gender-disaggregated data, that is likely to be a challenge. So how did your jurisdiction approach this, and how did you manage this challenge?

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: It is effectively one of the most essential elements for the model to work. The Andalusian regulations demand or, I guess, force in a way all the data to be gathered by gender to be extracted by the national statistics and cartography institute. The national institute of statistics defines and designs its annual planning with the sort of crosscutting presence of gender and all of the variables that they are taking into consideration.

Ms TAYLOR: Very good. And what lessons have you learned about best practice in impact analysis as part of the budget process? I am thinking specifically about your experience with gender responsive budgeting.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: The first one is that for the model to work, for it to achieve bigger equality, it must be linked in the budget. The second one is that the process must be institutionalised. It must be mandatory legally, and we must create a structure for all of the gender responsive budgetary process. And the third one is that we must make an effort, a big effort, to educate the staff, to train the staff. And the fourth one is that the organisation that leads the process must be the ministry of finance, in our case the regional ministry of finance.

Ms TAYLOR: Muy bien. Muchas gracias.

Mr MÉNDEZ CORTEGANO: Gracias a ustedes. Encantado. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, and thank you for your time this afternoon. That concludes the time we have for consideration of your evidence, but we thank you for your endeavours today. We thank all witnesses who have given evidence here today as well as all the committee staff, Hansard, the secretariat, Maria for her translation services and those who have supported our hearing, and we declare this hearing adjourned. Muchas gracias.

Committee adjourned.