

# Equality Budgeting

- Good afternoon, thank you members for this opportunity. The Equality Budgeting Campaign is a broad organisation made up of civil society and includes groups such as Irish Feminist Network, National Women's Council of Ireland, SIPTU, Unite the Union, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, SPARK and USI. The petition submitted for your consideration was signed by representatives of all these groups, as well as by interested members of the public.
- Equality Budgeting is an approach to economic policy-making and planning that places equality at the centre of decisions concerning public expenditure and income.
- Through equality audits and impact assessments, Equality Budgeting provides information on how different sections of society are impacted by specific economic policy measures.
- The objective of Equality Budgeting lies in ensuring this information is made available to public representatives, so that they can make informed policy decisions that achieve the best outcomes for specific disadvantaged groups, but also for society at large.
- Equality Budgeting goes beyond traditional approaches to policy-making and planning by:
  - Assessing impact of expenditure/resources on different sections of society
  - Assessing who benefits/who doesn't
  - Integrating equality as a driving principle
  - and, perhaps most crucially, Increasing transparency in budgetary process

## What are the benefits?

- Increased levels of information (disaggregated data, impact assessment)
- Increased levels of equality (knowledge of who is disproportionately impacted, evidence-based policy design, implementation & review)
- Increased levels of transparency (publication of information to show members of the public how they are affected; reform to budgetary process, such as draft budget & meaningful engagement of stakeholder)

## I will briefly outline how Equality Budgeting operates in other jurisdictions, as per the request of the Committee.

- Equality budgeting originated in the 1980s in the form of gender budgeting (pioneered by Australia)
- Over 60 countries have implemented or worked toward equality budgeting since then (e.g. Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Tanzania and Uganda)
- Some work done in Ireland toward this, especially within the Gender Mainstreaming Unit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Much of this subsequently reversed with dismantling of equality infrastructure since beginning of economic crisis

**I will focus in a little more depth on how Equality Budgeting works in Scotland, as this model has been especially useful to us in developing the ideas of our campaign.**

## **The Scottish Model**

- Equality and Budget Advisory Group (EBAG), made up of government and civil society actors, works with the government on devising the budget and equality-proofing economic policy measures
- Draft budget published in September before being finalised in January
- “Equality Statement” published alongside the budget, which highlights equality outcomes by theme (e.g. “health and wellbeing”) and by equality characteristic (gender, race, age, etc.) – full impact analysis done
- To give an example of how this works, the Equality Statement published alongside the most recent Draft Budget in Scotland (Sep 2013) describes how evidence from previous Equality Impact Assessments has been used to steer funding decisions on the national Parenting Strategy. For instance, based on that research, money has been allocated to projects aimed at tackling the higher costs faced by parents bringing up disabled children; targeting fathers in parenting programmes; and providing translated resources so that programmes are more inclusive of parents and children from ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup>
- In-depth research on the effects of the economic crisis published on the Scottish Government website, as well as the EBAG meeting minutes
- **Recently, representatives of the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection, Deputy Joanna Tuffy and Deputy Aengus O’Snodaigh, visited Scotland to liaise with government officials there on the subject of implementing Equality Budgeting.**

## **Equality Budgeting in Ireland**

- Particularly as Ireland now holds seat on UN Human Rights Council, essential to make good on promises regarding economic, social and cultural rights. In January 2011 a UN expert (Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona) investigated Ireland and criticised it for failing to respect the economic, social and cultural rights of its citizens during the time of economic crisis.

We are lobbying for Equality Budgeting to be introduced by:

- setting up a unit with responsibility for integrating equality horizontally across all economic policy processes and planning, with particular reference to the nine grounds of the Equal Status Acts
- giving this unit the power and resources to undertake or commission research on the impact of the economic crisis; and to equality-proof existing and future economic policy measures
- The Committee has asked how such a unit would operate with regard to having a veto over budgets. Our proposal does not envisage the unit having or requiring veto

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/09/8093/5>

powers. Instead, the unit would provide legislators with full information on the equality impact of a proposed Budget *in advance of* voting in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Thus, the unit itself would have no veto power, BUT its work would enable elected representatives to make a far more informed decision than is currently possible on whether or not to vote for a Finance Bill.

- the Committee has also enquired about how the work of the proposed unit would be quality impact assessed. We would suggest that the aims of the unit be set out clearly at an early stage. Following the first year of the unit's work, a review board be set up comprising unit representatives, stakeholders in the budgeting process, and external experts (for instance, an economic researcher from a different state). The board would assess whether the unit's aims had been met thus far, and how its work might be improved. Reviews by international authorities such as the European Commission and the World Bank would also provide useful measures of quality impact; in a World Bank study from 2005, Ireland's financial scrutiny of legislation was rated as the second-worst in the developed world. We would expect an effective Equality Budgeting unit to significantly improve ratings of Ireland's budgetary process on the European and world stages.

### **Is there a need for Equality Budgeting?**

We would argue YES. Budget 2012 was acknowledged to have had the most detrimental impact on lone parents and according to Dept. of Social Protection's own analysis, this trend continued in Budget 2013. They state that their budget that year had the most negative impact on working lone parents. Yet if we look at the data on poverty and deprivation in Ireland, this would appear to be an unjustified move as they had the highest levels of poverty and deprivation of any groups measured.

- The EU SILC (Survey of Income and Living Conditions) report 2011 is the most up to date figures we have on poverty and deprivation.
- 24.4% of general population suffered 2 or more forms of deprivation – yet this rises to 56% in the case of lone parents and their children. **230%** higher.
- Consistent poverty rate was 6.9 % for the general population, but for lone parent families was 16.4% or **238%** higher.

So while the Department of Social Protection's analysis was very welcome, it was carried out after the Budget had been passed rather than before. We are arguing for prospective as well as retrospective analysis, which would take account of existing research and allow for informed decision-making.

We would also offer two examples of decisions made which have unintended consequences and which involve both the Dept.'s of Social Protection and Education. In both these cases, prior equality audits could have prevented unforeseen long-term consequences that are turning out to be very damaging to the groups affected.

Ireland has an excellent education system and should be applauded for its efforts to make Third Level accessible to all socio-economic group through grants and indeed the excellent HEAR scheme. However, when Child Benefit was cut for all 18 year olds, there was no

provision made for dependent 18yr olds who may be still in school and where a parent is wholly reliant on social welfare. The Child Dependent rate is €29.80 but in under 18year olds is supplemented by the €30pw Child Benefit. €29.80 does not support the needs of an 18 year old and although no research has yet been carried out, anecdotally, we have heard cases where children are being forced to leave school early.

In July 2015 an estimated 63,000 lone parents will lose their entitlement to One Parent Family Allowance. This is the year they need to avail of training and education to become job ready, yet in Budget 2014, second payments have ceased to lone parents who avail of FAS/VEC courses (now Education and Training Board courses). This effectively bars them from taking up training and education opportunities.

We believe that the establishment of a unit to carry out pre-Budget equality audits and post-Budget impact assessments would help arm Ireland's elected representatives with the information and the resources to avoid these kinds of oversights in the future. We are confident that our legislators want to make decisions in the interest of *all* the people of Ireland, and we consider that Equality Budgeting would give them a powerful tool with which to do that. We would like to thank you for your time and would welcome any questions you may have.