

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHOMHIONANNAS INSCNE

JOINT COMMITTEE ON GENDER EQUALITY

Déardaoin, 30 Meitheamh 2022

Thursday, 30 June 2022

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Sorca Clarke,	Lisa Chambers,
Paul McAuliffe,	Regina Doherty,
Bríd Smith.	Pauline O'Reilly.

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Mairéad Farrell.

Teachta / Deputy Ivana Bacik sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Recommendations of the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: I thank our witnesses who are joining us in the committee room this morning. Members have the option of being physically present in the committee room but may also join the meeting via Microsoft Teams from their offices in Leinster House, as some are doing this morning. Members may not participate in the meeting from outside parliamentary precincts. I ask any members joining via Teams to please mute their microphones when not making a contribution and to use the raise hand function to indicate. In order to limit the risk of spreading Covid, the service encourages all Members, visitors and witnesses to continue to wear face masks when moving around the campus and when in close proximity to others and to adhere to public health advice.

We are meeting today to discuss recommendations 42 to 45, inclusive, of the citizens' assembly, which have regard to the gender equality principle in law and policy, with a particular focus on equality budgeting and data gathering on gender equality. I warmly welcome our witnesses. From the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, we have Ms Caroline O'Loughlin, assistant principal officer in performance and budgeting, and her colleague, Mr. Ed Hearne, principal officer in the national investment office. We are very grateful to both for joining us. From the Central Statistics Office, CSO, we have Ms Fiona O'Riordan, head of division, and Mr. Kieran Culhane, senior statistician. They are all very welcome.

I will read an important notice regarding parliamentary privilege. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they give to the committee but if directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given. They are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make them identifiable.

Before I call the witnesses to make their opening statements, I will say the committee has taken the view that it is our mandate to see how we can facilitate the implementation of the citizens' assembly recommendations. We are very much looking at the practical question of how best to implement those recommendations. Today, we are looking at recommendations 42 to 45, inclusive, in particular. We are very grateful to the witnesses for engaging with us on that very practical aspect of how to implement the recommendations. We are very grateful to the assembly, many of whose members join us online during our hearings, which did such work to create this blueprint for gender equality through its 45 recommendations.

I ask Ms O'Loughlin to make her opening statement on behalf of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: I thank the Chair for the invitation to appear before the committee and the opportunity to discuss how equality budgeting can contribute to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, and to answer any questions the committee may have about equality budgeting and its role within the overall expenditure framework.

Equality budgeting is a way of approaching and understanding the budget as a process that embodies long-standing societal choices about how resources are used, rather than simply a

neutral process of resource allocation. In practice, this means that equality budgeting attempts to provide greater information on how proposed or ongoing budgetary decisions impact particular groups in society, thereby integrating equality concerns into the budgetary process. Beginning with a pilot programme for the 2018 budgetary cycle, due to the availability of disaggregated data, the initial focus of equality budgeting was on gender, following which the initiative was broadened to other dimensions of equality, such as socioeconomic inequality, disability and minority groups. Integrated within the performance budgeting framework, equality objectives and indicators are published every year in the Revised Estimates Volume, REV, and the public service performance report. Six Departments were involved in the pilot and, following periodic expansion of this policy, all 18 Departments are now participating in equality budgeting.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is committed to working with other Departments, agencies, experts and advocacy groups to advance the equality budgeting initiative to best international standards. In 2018, an expert advisory group was established to guide development of this work. The role and objectives of the expert group are to give constructive critical feedback and to provide expert guidance and informed insight on the future direction and areas of focus for equality budgeting. Members of the group include key Departments, the CSO, the National Economic and Social Council, NESCC, the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, the National Women's Council of Ireland, the National Disability Authority and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

In 2019, the OECD was requested to conduct a review of the equality budgeting pilot and give recommendations on how this work could be progressed in line with international best practice. The report, published in 2019, provided 12 recommendations on how to drive this initiative forward. Implementation of the report's recommendations is now at an advanced stage. In order to assess the availability of disaggregated data, the CSO appointed a statistician to conduct a data audit in 2020. The results of the data audit, which are available on the CSO website, provide a central point of information and highlight where data gaps exist. Overseen by the CSO and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, a data strategy is currently being drafted to address this and identify measures that can enhance the data captured. Another OECD recommendation was the development of a tagging and tracking functionality for departmental expenditure. An EU-funded project to develop this capability is currently under way, with officials from the OECD in Dublin this week to meet pilot Departments.

To accelerate the implementation of equality budgeting, in 2021 the Government agreed to the establishment of an interdepartmental group for equality budgeting to facilitate the embedding of the initiative across all Departments. Members are accountable for ensuring that policymakers in their Departments are fully aware of, and implementing, equality budgeting policy, where applicable, and bringing all relevant work within their Departments to the attention of the performance budgeting unit to ensure that the strategic direction of equality budgeting is fully informed. This group will play a key role in guiding the continued progress of equality budgeting.

An ambitious work plan for equality budgeting policy is in place for the coming year, which aims to continue the momentum achieved to date and further advance this work. All Departments have been requested to conduct a skills and needs analysis to inform this work. Some Departments reported on this at the last interdepartmental group meeting in February, with remaining Departments due to report at the next meeting, which will be held later today. The equality budgeting framework is kept under constant review to ensure it best serves the purpose

of increasing transparency and accountability on public expenditure impact. Feedback from stakeholders is an essential part of this and we look forward to receiving feedback from this committee.

Chairman: I thank Ms O’Loughlin. That is very clear.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: I thank the Chair for the invitation to appear before the committee. The Central Statistics Office is Ireland’s national statistical institute and is responsible for the production, co-ordination and qualitative oversight of official statistics for Ireland. The CSO is an independent office of the Civil Service under the aegis of the Taoiseach. The National Statistics Board, with the agreement of the Taoiseach, has the general function of guiding the overall strategic direction of the CSO under the Statistics Act 1993. This independent position reflects international best practice for the organisation of official statistics. The role of the director general of the CSO, as prescribed by the Statistics Act 1993, provides that the officeholder acts independently and exercises sole responsibility in professional statistical matters. Under the terms of the Statistics Act 1993, the director general may request any public authority to consult and co-operate with him for the purpose of assessing the potential of records as a source of statistical information. In addition, the Act stipulates that a public authority shall consult with the director general, where it intends to introduce, revise or extend the retrieval of information or make a statistical survey.

Statistics on equality and anti-discrimination topics are highly relevant from a fundamental rights perspective. In order to meet national user needs in this area, the CSO uses data from administrative sources and statistical surveys to compile a range of outputs disaggregated by the equality-related characteristics. All results are disseminated in a highly accessible manner through a range of channels and are often accompanied by infographics, press releases, statistical releases and explanatory material. The CSO sits on several interdepartmental groups related to equality, including gender equality. We work closely with the expert advisory group on equality budgeting, have completed and published an equality data audit of the Irish public sector in 2020 and are currently developing a national equality data strategy with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The CSO is also working with the 30% Club public sector network. The goal of this network is that of improving gender balance across the public service population as an entirety, joining other areas of the Irish business community and the global community.

The recent 2022 census of population included questions on age, sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, country of birth and citizenship, general health and carers. The detailed census results, which will be published during 2023, will be disaggregated by these key characteristics at a detailed geographic level. Ireland is one of the few EU countries to collect data on ethnicity, religion and carers in its census of population. The CSO is planning to begin the consultation with the general public and data users later this year on questions for census 2027. The CSO expects that submissions will be received requesting the inclusion of new questions on gender identity and sexual orientation as part of this consultation. The successful development of questions on these topics as part of the CSO’s household surveys in recent years should enhance the prospects for both topics to be included in the next census.

The recent census contained questions on regular unpaid personal help or support to family members, neighbours or friends with a long-term illness, health issues or issues relating to age or disability, and the extent of the help provided. A thematic report, Health, Disability and Carers, similar to that published from the 2016 census, will be published in 2023. This will provide detailed data and analysis on those with a disability, while also examining changes in relation

to carers, looking at issues such as the age and gender profile of carers, the number of carers in each county, and the hours of care provided.

The CSO also conducts a number of household surveys to meet national and international user needs, including, but not limited to, the labour force survey, the survey on income and living conditions, and CSO pulse surveys. These surveys all contain a selection of core demographic variables, including age, sex and education. All results from these surveys, covering themes such as employment, poverty, health, household wealth etc., are disaggregated by sex and the other core demographic variables.

The CSO publishes policy-relevant research projects as part of its leadership role of the Irish statistical system. These include research projects related to many topics including gender equality, such as the employment analysis of maternity and paternity benefits. The 12th edition of the CSO's thematic social indicator report on gender, women and men in Ireland will be published in 2023.

The CSO also carries out an equality and discrimination survey on a five-yearly basis. This survey is designed to measure discrimination experienced in the previous two years. The survey collects data on ten grounds of discrimination, including gender. It covers workplace discrimination and discrimination experienced in accessing services. The CSO is undertaking a comprehensive national survey on the prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland. The safety of the person survey is a challenging survey operation involving the collection of highly sensitive personal data in a manner which is confidential, ethical and designed to support accurate and reliable survey results. The CSO has undertaken significant work in collaboration with the Department of Justice, NGOs, international experts and other stakeholders in this domain. The survey will establish the prevalence of sexual violence.

While a survey on sexual violence prevalence meets needs, a more broadly based survey on violence is also needed. Proposals at EU level for a directive on gender-based violence are at an advanced stage. Such a survey will cover sexual and non-sexual violence. Again, the data, when the survey is run, will be capable of analysis by sex and gender. It is expected that this survey will be first run in Ireland in 2024. The surveys on sexual violence and gender-based violence will provide comprehensive data on such important societal issues for Ireland.

The CSO also produces statistics on gender balance in business in response to the Balance for Better Business initiative and aims to provide benchmark information on gender representation. These statistics were compiled from surveys in 2019 and 2021 and provide benchmark statistics on gender representation at the most senior levels in large enterprises. Analysis of weekly and annual earnings by sex is included in the Earnings Analysis Using Administrative Data Sources publication. Results are available for 2011 through 2020. Analysis of earnings by sex is presented across economic sector, firm size, region lived, age and nationality. The official gender pay gap estimate for Ireland is compiled from the four-yearly structure of earnings survey, SES. This survey collects detailed data on hours worked by employees that is not available from administrative data sources. For non-SES years, an estimate of the gender pay gap is produced based on other available data sources.

New data sources that would improve our ability to provide more detailed and regular analysis of pay by gender are also being explored, notably the possibility of obtaining details of hours worked at an employee level from enterprises that are affected by the new gender pay gap reporting requirements. The identification, exploration and increased use of data sources is a specific aim of the CSO in meeting the increasing appetite for timely, relevant information on a

broad range of topics, including gender equality.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Culhane for that overview. In my previous life as an academic, I was very grateful for CSO data on crime when doing criminology work.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I thank our guests for their time this morning. It is always good to have people like them come in because it gives us very useful information.

I will start by saying that I absolutely love the CSO's website. It is one of the best resources that is out there. It is one of those rabbit holes that one can wander down on one's sofa and actually leave with a little bit of information on something that one did not know beforehand.

I will go to Ms O'Loughlin first. On the tagging and tracking functionality, she mentioned that the officials from the OECD are in Dublin this week to meet with the Departments taking part in the pilot. Which Departments are involved?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: The Departments of Transport, the Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: Great stuff. I just want to touch on the equality budget and that overarching strategy or set of goals. Is what we have at the moment effective for actually capturing the data that we need? Any legislation needs to be based on what is most beneficial to society, and that comes from having real quantitative data.

In terms of the interdepartmental group on equality budgeting, are all Departments represented on that group? Are members accountable for implementing equality budgeting? Is there a set of goals set for strategic implementation? If there is, how are they measured?

Has the Department looked at other countries or jurisdictions where this is done much more effectively than is the case here at present? If so, which countries has it looked at? If it has not done so, why is that the case?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: I will start with the data. As the Deputy said, data was one of our challenges. As we started out on equality budgeting, we identified very early that the availability of disaggregated data needed to be addressed. As I mentioned earlier, one of the first things we did was identify steps we could take to address that. The CSO appointed a statistician for an initial six-month period. She conducted a data audit of all the available data in Ireland. Obviously, that helped us because we realised that we were not always aware and, for example, sometimes there was duplication. We did not know what was out there, so it was great to have all of that information collected to a central point. That told us what was available and what we could base metrics on. It also told us where the gaps were and where we needed to address that. As stated earlier, a data strategy is in train at the moment. This is headed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the CSO. They are looking at measures that we can take to plug those gaps and where we can capture the data. The Deputy asked if the data are available. We have some data and we are working on improving that.

All Departments are represented on the interdepartmental group. We have terms of reference for which a representative from each of the Departments is accountable. It is a two-way process. The representatives bring our message back to the Departments and make sure that each is aware of equality budgeting and how it can implement it, and, then, *vice versa*, they make sure that we are aware of any relevant work being done in line Departments that will inform how equality budgeting is progressed. The group has been in operation for less than

a year. As mentioned, each Department has carried out a skills and needs analysis. Basically, this is an assessment of what they have that is suitable for equality budgeting and where they feel the barriers lie. They brought the results back to us and we discussed what we can do to address matters. As I said, half of the Departments did it at our previous meeting. We have a meeting later on today with the interdepartmental group and the remaining Departments will give their skills and needs analysis then. That will inform a work programme of how ensure, as the Deputy said, that it is being implemented and that Departments have realistic goals. Every Department is participating in equality budgeting, as in they report on at least one equality metric in the REV or the performance report. What we want to do in the short term is expand this in order that there is an equality budgeting metric for each programme of each Department.

What we have always said about equality budgeting is that is not a matter of clocking up metrics, ticking the box and saying that it is done. What we want equality budgeting to do is to be an example of how equality considerations can be properly implemented into performance budgeting as a whole. We have seen that even though some Departments perhaps only report on two or three metrics, we can see how their general performance metrics have improved. The focus has gone further to specific cohorts of society. That is the approach we have taken with equality budgeting from the start.

The Deputy also mentioned international best practice. In 2019, the OECD was asked to come over and do a scan of equality budgeting. What we had done was still very much in its infancy at that time, but it came to look at what we had done and give us recommendations on how we could progress the work. International best practice obviously played a key part in that. Something I should also mention is that we are very active on the senior gender budgeting officials group of the OECD. As far as I know, to date, Ireland is the only country that pursues equality budgeting. All other OECD countries reported on a gender budgeting only basis. However, it has to be said that the policies on gender budgeting are very transferable to all elements of equality and we have found that. That is also why we work very closely with colleagues in green budgeting and sustainable development goal, SDG, budgeting. International best practice has always been something that we have considered.

In the OECD recommended project dealing with tagging and tracking that the Deputy mentioned, we conducted technical assistance and information exchange visits, which are basically study visits, with other countries that do similar work. It is a really beneficial network where officials from different countries will exchange experience such as what was good and what were the pitfalls to be avoided. That has been beneficial to us. We continue to participate strongly in the OECD senior budgeting gender equality officials network. International best practice has always played a key role in how we progress this work.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: Ms O'Loughlin mentioned scan. My understanding is that at that time there was a concern that there was actually a hindrance by the fact that equality budgeting was not obligatory and that Departments had limited incentive or capacity to participate and were unclear on the ultimate goals of the initiative. Has that been addressed? Have significant steps been taken to address it?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: Yes absolutely. Significant steps have been taken. The key one is the establishment of the interdepartmental group. The Government took a decision in March last year that implementation of equality budgeting should be accelerated and a number of measures should be taken to facilitate that, the key one being the establishment of the interdepartmental group. We also had the expert advisory group which oversees progress of this work and gives critical feedback and expert guidance. Significant work has been done to implement

equality budgeting since 2019.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I will come back in later.

Mr. Ed Hearne: On that final point on the degree to which things are obligatory, our experience has been that in building up public financial reforms that the more we can do to build out the community practice within the Civil Service and within Government agencies, the more we can foster those networks, show good practice and show the benefit and impact of such initiatives. We found that coupled with some mandatory requirements where necessary, that is the approach to take to get these reforms to take root. Everything we have talked about with the various senior officials groups and the gradual implementation since the 2018 pilot has been very beneficial, showing the benefit of gradually building it up.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: As Ms O'Loughlin mentioned the Central Statistics Office, CSO, did an equality data audit in 2020 which was aimed at the public sector and the data sets out there, and what variables were available to allow this aggregation on the grounds of the dimensions of equality. For this group on gender 60% of the data sets we looked at were disaggregated or could be disaggregated by sex or gender. The one set that was not related to operational data sets that it probably may not be suitable for. It is an area with potential for more data if people want to analyse it. Our equality data audit that was not completed is a live document we did in 2020. It is on the CSO website for researchers and policy makers to look at. If there are other data sets we allow people to add to it and to tell us of other data sets that could be included and the breakdown of coverage of the dimensions on those data sets. Ms O'Loughlin also mentioned our national equality data strategy. We put together a working group with the CSO and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. That produced a document that put in place a strategic approach to improve the collection, use and dissemination of equality data across the public sector. We hope to have the strategy in place for 2023. It will provide a general approach for identifying current gaps in equality data and how to fill those gaps as well as develop standard practices and classifications that can be used across the public sector.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: Mr. Culhane raised an important point. The data collected declines significantly after gender and age in terms of the data set. Gender has 68 data sets, age has 65, but if we look at family status there are 19. There is that bit of a cliff edge. In fact the next closest to age in terms of data sets is race, which is at 26. There is that cliff edge of falling off of the collected data. Is there an agreed data structure? As you said, this is a live document, and it needs to be a live document. In terms of the questions asked and the information taken from it, is there a pre-existing agreement that certain questions will be asked now and that will grow by a certain percentage the next time these questions are put out there? Is there any engagement with other partners such as the national data infrastructure champions group? Are people like that involved in setting the questions? When we look at equality budgeting it is a really technical exercise and it needs to have that strategy attached to it so that the structural inequality that it is designed to address will actually be addressed. Does that make sense?

Mr. Kieran Culhane: We worked closely with the national data infrastructure champions group. That was one of the groups to which we put our survey out to see what data sets it had. These are data sets or surveys that are in the field already and have maybe been worked on for a number of years when it was not always considered suitable to ask many of the question. It still might not be. It may not be proportionate for the agency in case to ask questions on race or on family status if for example it is about collecting tax or giving a benefit. Our data strategy will try to suggest ways to fill those gaps but it may not necessarily mean for the collection of

data. It could mean linking of data sets. An agency may have been initiating one data set but it may have the information on another and if you need to go down the files are there and they can link-----

Deputy Sorca Clarke: They can speak to each other.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: Hopefully the strategy will not just be about saying we have to collect this data because that is difficult especially with general data production regulations, GDPR, you can only request what you require and what is proportionate for the reason the data is being collected. The strategy will look for other ways, and data linking and the use of identifiers in the system will help with that.

Chairman: I do not see any members indicating online. I have a range of questions following on from that exchange. I thank the witnesses for coming in. As Deputy Clarke said gender budgeting and data gathering sound quite dry and it is a technical exercise but of course the citizens' assembly was very clear as to its importance and as to the need to ensure proper and effective systems for equality budgeting in order to be able to drive the implementation of the other recommendations. For example that lack of data on pensions for carers can have a real impact on gendered impacts on carers and so on. The importance is clear. I will go back to some of the recommendations from the citizens' assembly and try to tease those out with the witnesses. Ms O'Loughlin and Mr. Hearne may respond to recommendation 42 on a statutory body for gender equality under the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister charged with cross-Government co-ordination of gender equality issues. It is very welcome to hear about the high-level steps and measures that have been adopted within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and across all the Departments, and working with the CSO and stakeholders. However, would a statutory body for gender equality and a specific Cabinet Minister responsible for this have an impact? Would that improve the capacity to engage in equality budgeting? I know the political decision is not something witnesses want to comment on but just to tease it out. The citizens' assembly made that recommendation because it was concerned about clear lines of accountability and responsibility for delivering gender equality across Government. Its recommendations on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence also recommended a specific Minister. We have seen the Minister for Justice really taking on that role, which is very welcome. There is now also a statutory body to be set up on that. However, the citizens' assembly also recommended this for gender equality more generally. How would that impact on the work currently being done on equality budgeting? That is one question relating to recommendation 42.

Recommendation 43 is the critical one on data gathering. There is a reference to care. The citizens' assembly identified areas where it saw data as deficient, limited or out of date, or even contested. Examples would be: domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; care; and gender pay gap measurement. From the presentations from the Department and the CSO, clearly a good deal of work is underway on the area of violence. The safety of the person survey is very welcome. The gender pay gap legislation obviously has an impact on that data. However, we are conscious that there are still deficiencies when it comes to care. Coming back to Mr. Culhane's point, it may not be that the data is missing but that it has not been linked up, for example, those engaged in providing care and their pension entitlements, which is something the citizen's assembly honed in on. How can we ensure improvements in gathering data on care in particular?

Regarding recommendation 44, the assembly recommended legislating for equality budgeting. How could legislating help to ensure an effective system of equality budgeting? I am looking at the OECD recommendation that if the practice was embedded in legislation, it would en-

sure that gender budgeting, in particular its objectives and insistence that accountability would be democratically proofed and insulated from economic and political changes. The interdepartmental group was mentioned as a very welcome development in ensuring co-ordination but would legislation help in this regard? There are quite a lot of issues there.

Mr. Ed Hearne: I might begin and then hand over to Ms O'Loughlin. Regarding the Chairman's final question about whether legislation would be appropriate or would help in this regard, it is clear, from what we are doing that and from the wider work that is ongoing within the Department, that we have a very ambitious reform in respect of performance budgeting generally. We have made some internal structural changes lately that bring equality budgeting, performance budgeting, green budgeting and all our initiatives on well-being budgeting into the same unit. This will really help to avoid us having buzz words or particular modules that get a lot of focus over a period but that are not fully embedded. Those changes will certainly will certainly help us. That is an ambitious programme of reform.

On legislation, when we look at other OECD colleague countries and other comparators, we have comparatively few provisions for public financial management in law compared to what is generally out there. We have legislation on how the Oireachtas appropriates budgets and how Voted expenditure and so forth is allocated but an awful lot of what we do, which is core practice in public financial management, is guided more by administrative arrangements and circulars. If we look at things that are core around the public financial procedures and the public spending code on how we make decisions for capital expenditure, much of what we have been doing around performance budgeting has not typically had its roots in legislation. For now, we are confident that the real thing is that we get the push from the bottom up, build out the community, have adequate expertise across the public sector and the Civil Service and set the requirements from the centre, for example, on the tagging project, which will be a really rich source of data on things like the improvement of the performance report and the equality modules within that. Between those two and embedding it along the lines of the administrative procedure we use for most other aspects of public financial management, that will drive the change. I will ask Ms O'Loughlin to come in regarding our work with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and the Department of Justice in the past.

Regarding the Chairman's first question about recommendation 42, that is ultimately a policy question. Our approach, as with all policy areas, is to make sure all our public financial frameworks, how we measure inputs, how we allocate resources, how we monitor performance and how we screen the impact of programmes are equally orientated towards equality and gender equality as they are to all the other fields of policy around our public capital programmes. That will continue to be our focus - to work with the relevant policy Departments and make sure we are backing them up with adequate provision across public financial management.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: The Chairman asked whether a statutory body is needed. Since equality budgeting was initiated, I do not think there has been a gap of expert guidance. This originally came from the Department of Justice and Equality, as it would have been at the time. We worked very closely with our colleagues in the equality division. They had done a lot of work on gender and other dimensions such as minority groups. It was very transferable to all the other dimensions of equality. Almost within months of equality budgeting being piloted, we establish an expert advisory group. We drew on the guidance of experts. That group included groups like the National Women's Council of Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the ESRI and the National Economic and Social Council. We also have an academic, Dr. Seamus Taylor from Maynooth University, on board. There was plenty of expert

guidance available to us. Since the expert advisory group has been established, I have also represented the Department on the national strategy for women and girls. Many of the skills and policies are very transferable to other dimensions of equality so I do not think that a lack of expertise guidance has been a problem for us when it comes to equality budgeting.

Chairman: That is very helpful. Is there a lead Cabinet Minister in the context of recommendation 42? It is across Departments. Obviously, Ms O'Loughlin is from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Looking at the different high-level initiatives, I can see some Departments are leading more on it than others.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform would be the lead Department on equality budgeting. However, we continue to work very closely with our colleagues in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, which means that the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration would be very active in this area.

Chairman: Do Ms O'Riordan and Mr. Culhane wish to come in, particularly on the issue of data on care, which the citizen's assembly referred to so specifically?

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: We include a question on care in the census. A census is held every five years and we have a very broad consultation in advance of any census. The consultation for census 2027 will start at the end of this year. Many groups, including Family Carers Ireland and the National Disability Authority, would come forward for inclusion on the census. We listen to everybody regarding what needs to be included and take some guidance as well from the national equality data strategy. Obviously, there are a lot of questions this year about whether we include questions on gender identity or sexual orientation so we feel we will be looking at those and will have representations towards the end of the year for the inclusion of those questions on the census in 2027. We take our lead from lots of other people and strategies to make sure it is an inclusive census that is representative of what people want to tell us. The carers question was included in census 2022. It asked about people who provide care outside of employment, that is, who provide it *gratis*, so we will have the results of that and disaggregate it by sex, etc. We will then be able to match it back to other sources of information. The Chairman mentioned pensions. We should be able to see if we can cross-classify on that.

Chairman: It is great to hear that because that was a real issue in the citizens' assembly recommendations. That is a new question in census 2022.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: There would have been a similar question. I think it was changed slightly. The new question involved someone who is not in employment but is doing it for free.

Chairman: Does Mr. Culhane wish to comment on some of those other recommendations - 42 and 43 - and the question of legislating for equality budgeting?

Mr. Kieran Culhane: We will leave that to the policy Departments.

Chairman: That is fine.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: On the issue of carers, if there is data out there, there is always the possibility that we could do analysis but we are statisticians and we sometimes need a nudge from a policy Department or a researcher to tell us what to look at or what questions to ask. Previously, with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, we did an analysis of maternity benefit and paternity benefit, the take-up rates and employment outcomes of claimants on both of those schemes. If there is data out there on carers, such as the

carer's allowance or other data sets out there that could be looked at more, and if the data is in the system somewhere, there is potential to do that using administrative data sources as well.

Chairman: We heard from the different stakeholders, such as family carers, when they were in before us of a frustration about a lack of co-ordination on data. It was a real issue they identified, as did the citizens' assembly. They did not feel that there was enough information about levels of care, in particular, unpaid care. It is good to hear there is likely to be an improvement in the extent of data available.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: We are statisticians. Unfortunately, we are led very much by standards and classifications. This may be an issue. "Carers" is a broad term and in order to disaggregate we would need a classification or a standard to make it realistic.

Chairman: We talked about definitions and that was a difficult one.

I will call Deputy Clarke but I have one more big question, if I may, for all of our guests. I was struck by Ms O'Loughlin's point that equality budgeting should not be a box ticking exercise. Given that we are now in a process where there has been equality budgeting going on for some years, can Ms O'Loughlin say that has improved the process of budgeting? Are there outcomes? Sometimes, particularly for people who are listening online, it is dry and technical. What are the outcomes? What are the tangible improvements from engaging in this process? Can we see any already? Will it take more time to bed down?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: Yes, absolutely. The approach we have always taken with equality budgeting is that it would be embedded into the already existing performance budgeting framework. Performance budgeting shows us exactly what resources each Department has been allocated and what they have done with those resources. Over the past number of years, we have focused not on outputs but on outcomes and impacts, and not only what have they spent the money on but how has that improved society or changed people's lives. As I said, that is what we want equality budgeting to do. It is to sharpen the focus of policy Departments, when policy is being written, on how the impact on certain cohorts of society will be maximised.

We can certainly see, especially over the past number of years, in the performance budgeting framework as a whole that the metrics are much more targeted and we can see the evidence of the impact of public expenditure on society and people's lives. Ultimately, that provides evidence-based information that will inform future allocations. We certainly can see the improvement over the past number of years into the whole budgetary cycle.

Chairman: Can Ms O'Loughlin identify any particular impact or policy that might have changed as a result?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: One that comes straight to mind is that we have done an awful lot of work with our colleagues in the Department of Health in the disability sector. We worked three years ago with them. They rewrote all of their performance metrics regarding disability expenditure of €2 billion in that particular year. It gave much more detailed information and shone light on what impact exactly that expenditure was having. It was a key tool as negotiations and resource allocation went on for the year. That would be one example of how it has improved the available data for future decisions.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: Downstream of that, something that we would notice is the demand for data. That is looking at it in reverse. We would notice there is a significant demand for data, especially this kind of gender-type data. I presume one is pulling the other. People are seeing

outcomes and they want more data. We are under continuous pressure to provide more data.

Chairman: I can imagine. The CSO's website is getting more and more visitors.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: Not to add to the pressures of demand for data, the citizens' assembly was clear in what it wanted Government to do in terms of a referendum. If the referendum were to be put to the people next year, if it were to pass and if there was a more definitive definition of what care is and what care looks like, would that increase the options for the CSO when it comes to the next census form, the 2027 census form, in terms of the questions that the CSO would like to ask to be able to get that data on care?

I am interested in this tagging and tracking. Ms O'Loughlin stated they were being piloted in three Departments: the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the Department of Transport. Mr. Culhane spoke of disability. Is the Department of Health already included in this, and if not, why is it not one of those pilot Departments?

There has been talk of performance and timelines. Are they confident that they have the resources they need to be able to see the change that has been highlighted by the public?

Finally, in relation to sexual violence, in 2018, there was a national survey approved by Government and there was a memorandum of understanding signed in January 2019. I understand that the previous comparative survey of this kind would have been, in 2002, the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland, SAVI, report. There was €150,000 put by in 2019 and an agreement in principle to fund the rest of that project. Was that agreement met by the Department?

I understand that the formal survey, in terms of field operation, was planned to commence this month and run until November. Is this still the case? If not, is there a revised timeline for this survey? If there is a revised timeline for completion, what is the impact on the revised timeline for publication?

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: I will answer the Deputy's last questions first. The sexual violence survey, which, for ethical reasons, is being called the Safety of the Person survey, commenced at the end of May this year. It is in the field at present. I am happy to say that it is not going too badly right at this point in time.

Chairman: That is great.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: Its collection will finish in November. It is being collected on what we call multi-mode methodology where you can do it online, in person where an interviewer will call to your house or by paper survey for people who are not happy with technology.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: What of publication? What are we looking at? Will it be next summer?

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: Publication is due some time next year. I cannot give an exact date. It probably will be Q1 or Q2 next year.

Chairman: I thank Ms O'Riordan.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: That is due to be held every ten years. That was the agreement. It was delayed by a year because of Covid.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: On Deputy Clarke's question on a referendum and legislation making life easier for data collection, ideally, I suppose if there were some data requirements and definition included in whatever legislation was done that required collection out there on a more regular basis than a five-yearly census, that would obviously make things more easy for us.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: Deputy Clarke was asking about the tagging and the tracking, and the pilot Departments that were used. The three Departments we selected were selected because it was a pilot. We wanted to identify Departments where it was likely to be more problematic. This was a huge culture change. Departments would not have had to tag expenditure in this way before. Given the OECD team was to come over physically to the country and work with the Departments to do this, we tried to identify three Departments that would probably have most difficulty in doing this across all of the dimensions. We asked them to tag against green budgeting, nine grounds of equality budgeting and also for well-being budgeting, which is currently under development as well.

The reason that those Departments were picked was because they had a broad array of different dimensions. If we had picked a Department, such as the Department of Health, for tagging and tracking, in some ways it may have been more obvious. We wanted to pick the Departments that would be more difficult and would benefit from having the OECD expertise there with them to do the pilot. That was the reason those three Departments were selected.

The issue of tagging and tracking arose at a recent meeting of another Oireachtas committee when Senator Higgins asked similar questions. We told her about the long-term use of tagging and tracking and how it would not just be an exercise that would be done now, but would instead be built upon over the coming years and would inform long-term planning. It will facilitate the expansion of equality budgeting and performance budgeting greatly and contribute to the budgetary process as a whole.

Mr. Ed Hearne: I will add to that point briefly. We do not just view this as tagging initiatives that try to obviate a particular type of inequality. We need to have the data to be able screen all programmes across all sectors for the various intended and unintended impacts they may have. The starting point will be those programmes that target particular inequalities, but we need to be able to do more screening at the outset in the long term. That will inform how tagging and tracking develops over time.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: I thank the witnesses.

Ms Fiona O'Riordan: I might say something about carers. We ask about people caring. We have a labour force survey, which we conduct every quarter, that has questions that lend themselves to carers. However, the standard classification is not clear enough. From what the Deputy is saying, it is probably not as precise as she would like it to be. Perhaps we need to consider having a standard classification. We ask people whether they work for payment, profit etc. In that instance, carers may say that they do not because what they do is not for payment or profit. However, we ask the caring question in many of our household surveys.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: It is something that this committee has heard about, particularly as it relates to younger carers who have a caring role but do not identify themselves as carers because, for example, they do not believe they are full-time carers if they are going to school or to part-time work. There is a wider question around the definition of caring and what care looks like, be it in the home or the community.

Ms Fiona O’Riordan: The International Labour Organization’s definition of employment and whether someone is employed is complex. What the Deputy is referring to is probably at a similar level.

Chairman: It arose extensively at our meetings, not just in terms of children but also older adults who were taking on caring roles, often incrementally as a relative’s condition deteriorated. Is the standard classification that the CSO uses for care drawn from-----

Ms Fiona O’Riordan: We do not have a standard classification. We ask a question. The International Labour Organization, ILO, classification of employment is complex. We have anecdotal evidence that people feel that they are sometimes not represented when we ask them questions about their caring. The way people are asked these questions is slightly subjective. I am coming from a survey perspective. Mr. Culhane might have a more administrative data perspective. For example, the Department of Social Protection has information on the carer’s allowance whereas we are asking people questions. That is the subtle difference.

Chairman: I thank Ms O’Riordan. That is helpful. Does Deputy Clarke have further questions?

Deputy Sorca Clarke: No.

Chairman: Since no one is indicating, I will ask a final question before we let the witnesses go. It has to do with the text of the citizens’ assembly recommendation No. 43, which calls not just for data gathering and regular publication, which we have discussed, but also for remedial action where necessary. I am interested in what remedial action is being taken on equality budgeting currently. Ms O’Loughlin mentioned that she could see the impact in terms of health, in that equality budgeting shone a light on the impact on specific groups and broke it down by gender and so on. What is the remedial action? Does that change the budgetary allocation? I believe Ms O’Loughlin stated it fed into the process, so I presume it can change the way resources are allocated. What other remedial actions might be relevant? Regarding gender pay gap surveys, Mr. Culhane stated there would be greatly increased data with the new legislation, but clear remedial action is set out in that legislation. Is similar remedial action required or being put into place for other areas where budgeting discloses gender discrimination or imbalances?

Ms Caroline O’Loughlin: Equality budgeting is embedded in performance budgeting, which tries to increase transparency and accountability in how public funds are allocated and used and what impact they have. Equality budgeting adds a new lens. It does not examine just what impact public expenditure has, but also what impact it has on different cohorts in society. We hope it will build that examination into the policymaking process so that, when people in the line Departments are writing policy, they have this additional end focus, thereby sharpening up policy from start to finish. Since it is part of the budgetary process, it will inform future budget allocations based on evidence. We work closely with the CSO to ensure this is evidence-based analysis. There is a greater demand for this evidence now.

Equality budgeting and performance budgeting have always taken the approach of taking feedback from stakeholders. The citizen is at the heart of that, but there must also be transparency for and accountability to the Houses of the Oireachtas. We regularly appear before the Committee on Budgetary Oversight as well as other committees. Feedback from all of these groups is essential to our work. We need to know what information legislators need us to provide them with. We have taken feedback on board. I can think of specific issues. In the

early days of equality budgeting, for example, we were very much focused on trends whereas the feedback from the Oireachtas committees was they wanted the focus to be on targets and achievements. We redesigned the entire layout of the performance report based on that feedback. We will continue to take feedback. Equality budgeting needs to best serve its purpose. We will make sure that whatever feedback we get is reflected.

Chairman: That is clear. I thank Ms O'Loughlin.

Mr. Kieran Culhane: Recently, the CSO has started producing the frontier data series. The quality of data or methodologies used are a little more experimental and possibly not as robust as our official statistics, but they fill a short-term need for data. In recent years, we have produced a large amount of Covid statistics. Currently, we are producing data on the crisis in Ukraine. The frontier series presents the potential for work that can fill short-term gaps. The data may not be as robust, but they still contain insights. This kind of work is something we can do in a shorter term to fill some of the gaps where there are some data available.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Culhane. That is a creative point. The data on Ukraine came out quickly.

That concludes our public hearing unless the witnesses would like to add anything else they believe we should have covered but did not. If not, I thank them for giving their time. I am conscious they appear before many committees, so we appreciate them appearing before us to address the specific recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

Just as I am closing the meeting, I see Deputy Farrell entering. To be fair-----

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: My schedule changed.

Chairman: The Deputy had indicated she wanted to contribute. We were about to conclude.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: And there I was rushing down, but if it is too late, that is okay.

Chairman: Not at all. We are well within time. I am sorry to put the Deputy on the spot. Does she have a number of questions?

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I was trying to listen, but it has been a hectic morning. I thank the Chair for letting me attend. I am interested in the issue of equality budgeting. A number of the witnesses discussed difficulties around definitions. Is there a working or operational definition that could then be refined? This could be by way of the Gini coefficient. Although it is not perfect, with regard to equality budgeting, the Gini coefficient is one metric we could use to see how a given measure might impact inequality. With regard to tax expenditure, efforts could be made to incorporate tax gap analysis. That is already being done in some EU jurisdictions with regard to a range of taxes. Tax gap analysis relates to the amount of tax revenues lost to taxpayer non-compliance and tax avoidance and the impact of Government tax policy choices. Will Ms O'Loughlin comment on that? I will try to look through my notes before my next question.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: I mentioned the equality budgeting expert advisory group earlier on. This group has been in existence pretty much since the initiative for equality budgeting began. The Department of Finance has been a key member of that group since the start. There is a lot of consideration of tax measures. The group reports regularly and published a paper on budget day last year. The suggestions the Deputy has made here today are very good. We will take them on board and bring them back to that expert advisory group.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I will mention one of the concerns people have with equality budgeting. We all see it sometimes. You look at the budget and pick out the measures that can be seen as equality measures. However, we all know that budgetary choices can really impact on the most marginalised in society. What would Ms O'Loughlin say to people who are concerned that the outcome of this will be that people just look at the budget after the fact and pick out the equality measures?

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: We try to increase our work on equality budgeting every year. We have mentioned requests for data and the need for data. We are trying to provide as much of an evidence base as possible so that, when budget negotiations are going on, the Departments and the political participants have all of the evidence they need to inform their decisions. We try to increase this year on year. I have spoken to the Deputy before in meetings of other Oireachtas committees about the public service performance report and the data it captures. As I have mentioned, we try to format it as a key tool for dialogue between committees and the Departments with regard to what is captured within it. More use could be made of that information.

As I said earlier, we take feedback from those conversations that happen. If an Oireachtas committee makes it known that it wants a given thing to be captured, we will make sure it gets captured in the next edition of the performance report. The Oireachtas committees have a key role in informing what gets included in this report.

I encourage as much use of this report as possible. As a unit, we try to increase this year on year. I do not want to go over it again but an awful lot of work has been done. We have spoken to the Deputy about this before. I refer to the data audit, the data strategy and expanding the programme to other dimensions of equality. We are trying to address that as best we can and to make sure it increases year on year and that the momentum equality budgeting has had thus far is maintained through increasing the availability of information.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I have one last question. That is a really good point. As Ms O'Loughlin knows, I really love that report. It is excellent. It is so detailed and there is so much information in it. It highlights failings. In terms of equality budgeting, is there a mechanism in place for instances where certain Departments are not taking it seriously? Change can be difficult in any institution, any walk of life or any job. A lot of the time, I am not the biggest fan of change myself. Is there a mechanism to deal with Departments that are being more difficult? I am not asking Ms O'Loughlin to name them.

Ms Caroline O'Loughlin: With regard to the process, within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, there are dedicated Vote sections, that is, there is a unit working specifically to each Department. We in the central performance budgeting unit provide guidance on what information should be collected and we help Departments with capturing it. Things therefore have to go through a number of filters before being included in the report.

Ultimately, because it is the Departments' work and because it is the Departments themselves that will be answerable to Oireachtas committees, they must retain ownership of what goes in. However, we can influence that in that we provide guidance, as I have said. The information comes back directly to the individual Vote sections first. These sections have in-depth knowledge of the work that goes on in the Departments. The role of the Vote section is to make sure the right information is captured and to give constructive feedback to the line Departments to ensure the right metrics are being captured in the right way.

As I mentioned before, we make sure the information is very accessible. We do not want a load of technical jargon in the report that nobody can understand. It has to be done in a way that the general citizen can understand. As I have said, there are a number of filters to go through but ownership ultimately remains with the line Department.

To go back to the feedback, the dialogue with line Departments and the different Oireachtas committees, when an issue comes up and a committee tells a line Department during a meeting that it wants something changed or something included in the report, it always comes back to us. Unfortunately, that does not happen too often. If there was more dialogue in that regard, it would improve what is captured in the report.

Chairman: That is very helpful. I thank Ms O'Loughlin. Is Deputy Farrell finished?

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Yes. I apologise for the delay.

Chairman: Not at all. I am glad we could accommodate the Deputy. That exchange has given us all a real insight into the inner workings of the budgetary processes. I thank Ms O'Loughlin for that. I will now bring the meeting to a close. I warmly thank our witnesses today: Ms O'Loughlin and Mr Hearne from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and Ms O'Riordan and Mr. Culhane from the Central Statistics Office. We are grateful to them all for giving their time and for feeding into our deliberations on the recommendations of the citizens' assembly. We all found the exchanges really useful and valuable.

The joint committee adjourned at 10.37 a.m. until 9 a.m. on Thursday, 7 July 2022.