MENA Senior Budget Officials Network

Budgeting for Societal Outcomes: Gender, Youth & SDGs Budgeting

18-19 July 2019, Caserta

The MENA Senior Budget Officials Network (MENA-SBO), chaired by Qatar and Ireland, is a forum to exchange good practices between OECD and MENA countries, in the field of budgeting and public financial management. It has been operating for more than 10 years.

The meeting on 18-19 July was organised by the MENA-OECD Governance Programme Training Centre of Caserta and opened by Alberto Petrucci on behalf of SNA and by Renata Pavlov, Executive Director of the Caserta Centre.

It brought together delegates representing Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia and Turkey, Spain, Italy and Ireland. Chaired by Mr. Ronnie Downes, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland, the meeting discussed how public budgeting can advance positive gender, youth and societal outcomes as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The OECD presented the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life as a tool for governments to integrate gender equality in the various domains of public policy. The focus of discussions was on gender budgeting as a tool to achieve concrete outcomes. Based on the OECD publication on Gender Budgeting in OECD countries, participants discussed emerging trends across OECD countries and lessons learned from “early” champions including Canada, Iceland and Austria. This was complemented by presentations delivered by Italy, Spain, Jordan and Morocco.
The session “Towards Youth Budgeting?” focused on the role of public expenditures to empower youth in being drivers for inclusive growth. Lebanon and Spain presented ongoing initiatives fostering financial literacy among children and adolescents and assessing the impact of public expenditure decisions on the young generation. The OECD presented comparative evidence in this field from the 2018 Youth Stocktaking report.

In the final session the OECD Secretariat presented on other initiatives in the area of budgeting for societal outcomes, specifically green budgeting, which looks at how budgeting can better support the achievement of environmental objectives, and Wellbeing Budgeting in New Zealand, which aims to focus new spending on the achievement of five national wellbeing goals. Lastly, the potential for the budget to also be used as a lever to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals was discussed. The Secretariat highlighted initial country experiences in SDG budgeting from Finland, Sweden and Mexico, and invited delegates to learn more through the upcoming launch of the OECD Hub on SDGs.

3 Key Outcomes

1. Gender gaps persist in education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life opportunities and outcomes both in MENA and OECD countries. Gender budgeting tools, techniques and procedures can help prioritise tax and spending towards policies that help close gender gaps. A substantial number of MENA and OECD countries have introduced or are actively considering the introduction of gender budgeting. Discussions demonstrate that a wide variety of gender budgeting approaches are practised, but some challenges are common to all countries, such as limited availability of gender disaggregated data and challenges in ensuring gender impact assessments are not just a “tick-box” exercise. Participants noted that further analytical work and sharing of experience in this area would be particularly useful.

2. Public budgets present a powerful tool to support the transition of young people to adult life and promote inter-generational equity. Countries increasingly acknowledge the need to invest in financial literacy, involve youth in public expenditure decisions and assess their impact across generations. Future work could focus on developing an analytical framework to guide countries in achieving positive outcomes for youth and inter-generational equity through public budgeting.

3. Gender and youth budgeting provide useful lessons for a shift in approach from traditional budgeting towards budgeting for societal outcomes. Countries spoke of their desire to use the budget to address international challenges such as climate change and the achievement of the SDGs. The experiences of Iceland and New Zealand in this area provide a set of good practices that other countries can take inspiration from.