

Canada just released a gender-based budget and this is WTF that means ^[1]

An explainer.

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This budget is the first to include gender-based analysis across all departments.

Gender-based analysis is a way for policymakers to evaluate how programs impact men, women, and gender-diverse people differently. The Canadian government first committed to a gender-based analysis of government programs in 1995, but without full implementation across the federal bureaucracy, the initiative had limited impact in shaping government decisions.

Last year, the government promised gender-based analysis across all government departments, and the 2018 budget is informed by that review. The government calls its approach gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), with the plus meant to take other factors like race, ethnicity, age, disability, and sexual orientation into account as well.

The government's embrace of gender-based analysis has been cheered by women's advocacy groups. Tanya van Biesen, the executive director of Catalyst Canada, a nonprofit that advocates for female advancement in the workplace, called it "a critical step in advancing a more balanced and productive society."

"This practice is something that has been in place in a number of OECD countries for several years and it is encouraging to see Canada stepping up," she told BuzzFeed Canada.

So what's actually in the budget?

The main theme of the budget is "equality," which is also in the title.

The government has promised to close the wage gap in federally-regulated industries through legislation that will force employers to make sure men and women are being paid equally for equal work. There will also be new pay transparency measures for these workplaces, meant to highlight any existing wage gaps.

Federally regulated industries employ almost a million workers in Canada and include banking, telecommunications, and transportation.

Other gender equity programs and initiatives include:

- Expanded parental leave for families with two parents, with the secondary parent required to take a minimum of five weeks or lose that time

- \$100 million over five years to reduce violence against women, including money specifically set aside for fighting gender-based violence at universities and colleges
- More money for fostering female entrepreneurs
- Up to \$6,000 for women who train to enter male-dominated trades like welding and plumbing
- \$2 billion over five years to pursue an "international feminist agenda" in foreign aid and development

What's missing?

Despite the budget's overall theme of gender equity, many advocates say they're disappointed in the lack of child care announcements.

"We are astounded that Finance Minister Bill Morneau has chosen to ignore the solid evidence that lack of access to affordable child care is the biggest barrier to women's equal participation in the paid labour force," Morna Ballantyne, executive director of Child Care Now, said in a statement.

According to the Child Care Resource and Research Unit, there is a regulated child care space for only one in four children in Canada.

Armine Yalnizyan, an independent economist who previously worked for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said many of the budget's initiatives are a step in the right direction in order to boost women's economic participation.

"But the way you're going to move the dial the most is by offering more child care opportunities," she said. "That was absent in this budget."

Is everyone on board with gender-based analysis?

The Conservative opposition has vowed to vote against the budget for not shrinking the deficit. Outspoken libertarian MP Maxime Bernier previously described gender-based analysis as "identity politics nonsense."

Some pundits have also derided the budget's gender focus as marketing the Liberals' progressive bona fides rather than focusing on the country's economy.

But Yalnizyan said the budget could represent a "radical" change in the way governments think about budgets. She said the last 30 years of budgeting has been narrowly focused on tax cuts and deficits, whereas the latest Canadian budget is more about "what we want our governments to do for us."

She said with an aging population, getting more economic growth necessarily means focusing on how to empower women.

"The last 40 years you've seen women doing it for themselves. But now if you want more from us, you've got to support women to support the economy," she said.

"No country that doesn't have a gender equity plan is going to grow as quickly."

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