

Cherche la Femme in the National Budget of Israel November 2014

This year, for the first time, the books that comprise the proposed budget of the State of Israel for fiscal 2015 include the beginnings of a gender analysis of the budgets of government ministries and agencies. These are the first fruits of the work led by the Adva Center for more than a decade. The fruits ripened this year thanks to the actions of MK Dr. Aliza Lavie (Yesh Atid), Chair of the Knesset Committee for the Promotion of the Status of Women, and MK Merav Michaeli (Labor); Yael Mevorach, deputy head of the Budgets Department at the Ministry of Finance, who was appointed by Finance Minister Yair Lapid to chair a Committee for Examining Gender Auditing of the Budget of the State of Israel; members of the committee and additional Finance Ministry officials who were highly dedicated to the task.

The preparatory work of the Adva Center included organizing a coalition of feminist and human rights organizations – The Women's Budget Forum. The Forum published position papers and initiated numerous meetings of Knesset committees on the subject of gender auditing. Adva's work also included organizing seven conferences featuring gender budgeting experts from abroad as guest speakers and organizing meetings between experts from Sweden, France, England and Germany and Israeli legislators, Finance Ministry officials and officials from a number of municipalities.

Gender budgeting or gender auditing is a strategy for increasing gender equality recommended by the United Nations and by the European Union. Gender budgeting has additional advantages, among them increasing budget transparency and increasing the fit between the differential needs of women and men and girls and boys and the services financed by the state or the municipality.

Over the last ten years, the gender budgeting work of the Adva Center at the national and municipal levels has been the recipient of generous support from the Hadassah Foundation, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Jewish Women's Foundations of Boston, Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., and Baltimore, and the Women's Amutot of Miami, as well as from the European Union, Cordaid (Holland) and the Heinrich Boell Foundation. Adva is grateful for that support, without which we could not have gone nearly as far as we did! We are also grateful for the ongoing operational support of The New Israel Fund and the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation, which gave us the basis from which we could reach out.

Adva's work found a concrete expression on the level of national government, as described in the *Budget Summary*, the main document of the proposed budget for fiscal 2015: "Following government decision 2084 on October 7, 2014, the subject of which was the adoption of the recommendations of the Committee for Examining Gender Auditing of the Budget of the State of Israel, it was decided to gradually implement a gender audit of the state budget and to mainstream gender into the budget-making process within four years. This is the first time that government ministries were instructed to conduct a preliminary gender audit of their budgets and of the uses to which they are put and to act to formulate policy and priorities based on the audit" (*Budget Summary*: 69). This is a very significant achievement: government recognition of the fact that budgetary policy is not neutral but has direct implications for gender inequality.

Following the "Protective Edge" campaign, the timetable for preparing the state budget for fiscal 2015 was shortened. Government ministries were given no more than two weeks to add a chapter to their budget books, "Gender Audit of the State Budget." The audit was done under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance, in accordance with one of the recommendations of the Committee.

The preliminary gender audits form an integral part of the budget books tabled at the Knesset in November 2014.