

**Submission of the Equality Rights Alliance to
Productivity Commission, *Data Availability and Use
Inquiry***

29 July 2016

Equality Rights Alliance

Equality Rights Alliance is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together 61 organisations with an interest in advancing women's equality.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Data Availability and Use inquiry, we have taken this opportunity to highlight data gaps in the development of gender-responsive policies. Equality Rights Alliance supports making public sector data available through an open data agenda. However, this objective is best served when the available data high quality, disaggregated by gender and other relevant markers.

Data and Evidence-Based Policy to Advance Gender Equality

“One hardy perennial is the suggestion that government should substantially improve their own service provision by using data to strengthen the evidence base for their policies and to improve regulatory implementation and enforcement.”¹

Gender statistics² are critical to the development of effective policies to advance gender equality. The availability and use of gender relevant and disaggregated data supplies the foundation for design, development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and policies to advance gender equality.³ An example of gender relevant data providing invaluable information for policy development is the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health.⁴

Gender statistics are also integral in the evaluation and monitoring of policies, providing a level of accountability and indication of performance for governments. An example of this is the 2013 *Tracking Equity: comparing outcomes for women and girls across Australia* report. *Tracking Equity* cast a gender lens over national policy reform initiatives by bringing together relevant gender disaggregated data from across government to assess the effectiveness of policies for women and girls. The abolition of the COAG Reform Council has seen the discontinuation of the *Tracking Equity* report and a subsequent gap in the collation of this data. Further, the report was also an opportunity to identify existing gaps in gender statistics.⁵

Recommendation: Investigate options for the restitution of the *Tracking Equity* report.

¹ Productivity Commission, *Data Availability and Use Issues Paper* (2016)

² “Gender statistics are defined as statistics that adequately reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life.” from UNStats, Gender Statistics Manual -*What are Gender Statistics?* 2015, retrieved 14 July 2016 <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/genderstatmanual/What-are-gender-stats.ashx>

³ OECD, *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2014, p. 176

⁴ Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, *About the Study*, 2016, retrieved 27 July 2016, <<http://www.alswh.org.au/about/about-the-study>>

⁵ “In some important areas, the council is hindered in its reporting on outcomes for women and girls by the lack of nationally comparable and recent data.” From Australian Policy Online, *Tracking equity: comparing outcomes for women and girls across Australia*, 2013, retrieved 14 July 2016 <http://apo.org.au/resource/tracking-equity-comparing-outcomes-women-and-girls-across-australia>

Time-Use Data: You can't manage what you don't measure.

It is now ten years since the last Work, Life and Family Survey in Australia, and the next survey is not scheduled until 2019. The usefulness of time-use data largely rely on regular and systematic collection.⁶ “Economic policy is targeted on the paid economy. However unintended impacts on the unpaid economy may limit how effective any policy can be.”⁷

Time-use surveys are the only accurate record of relationships between paid and unpaid work in the home and the sharing of responsibilities between men and women for these activities. They also measure other dimensions of economic and social progress, (including time contributed to unpaid caring and volunteer activities outside the home, and, from a health perspective, time spent on self-care and sleep). They are critical to valuing the unpaid economy and to establishing the costs to families and to the economy of the transfer of caring work between the paid and the unpaid sectors.

The closest fall back surveys are the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey funded until 2019 through the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, and the Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI), launched in 2007 and last conducted 2014 as part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant.

HILDA is designed to collect data in relation to economic and subjective well-being, labour market dynamics and family dynamics. Topics include education, current employment and employment history, job search experience, income, health and well-being, child care, housing, family background, marital history and family formation. AWALI is focussed on work-life interactions and has implications for fertility rates, labour supply and measures affecting workplace flexibility.

These are very both valuable data sources. Both have critical policy applications. Neither appears to have ongoing funding, and we strongly support their continuance. However, neither is designed or intended to do the work of a Time Use survey.

A thirteen year gap in capturing the unpaid economy is unacceptable for policy development, considering policy imperatives to boost women's participation in the paid economy, particularly the Government's 2014 commitment to the G20 goal of reducing the gap in workforce participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent by 2025.

Recommendation: Ensure regular and systematic collection of time-use data.

⁶ ANU Gender Institute, *Counting for nothing: Cancellation of time-use survey*, 2013, retrieved 14 July 2016 <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/news/counting-nothing-cancellation-time-use-survey>

⁷ S Himmelweit, 'Making Visible the Hidden Economy: the Case for Gender-impact Analysis of Economic Policy,' *Feminist Economics*, 8(1), 2002.

Gender in Household Data

A comprehensive picture of the housing issues women face is obscured by data on households, rather than individuals. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data on the social housing wait list data captures the number of households, rather than individuals within households. As a result, it is not possible to access a count of women waiting for social housing in Australia.

The challenges to understanding poverty and deprivation within households is overcome somewhat by the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM). The IDM is a gender-sensitive and multidimensional measure of poverty revealing intra-household variation by considering multidimensional poverty at an individual level.⁸ There is promising scope for the IDM to inform the indicator process for the Sustainable Development Goals in Australia.

On the issue housing data, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is vital in delivering high quality research on housing issues in Australia. Availability of housing affordability data has declined since the abolition of the National Housing Supply Council. It is imperative that government funding for AHURI continues.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators

*“We the Ministers and high representatives, having met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, **Stress** that the availability and use of accessible, timely, reliable and high-quality disaggregated data underpins our efforts to leave no one behind by, inter alia, identifying inequalities. Such data should measure poverty in all its forms and dimensions as well as progress on sustainable development, to reveal inequalities, gaps, progress and recurrent challenges, identify innovative solutions and inform the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.”*

Ministerial Declaration of the 2016 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development⁹

The broad scope of the 2030 Agenda highlights the need and importance for Government Departments to share information and data, to inform a whole of Government approach to the SDGs. Data pertaining to the SDG indicators must be recognised as of high value to the public, research, academic and community sectors.

The Australian Government must collect and collate data relevant to the SDG indicators to participate in voluntary annual reporting to the UN High-level Political Reform.¹⁰

Recommendation: The Australian Government should participate in voluntary national reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals

⁸ S Wisor, S Bessell, F Castillo, J Crawford, K Donaghue, J Hunt, A Jaggar, A Liu and T Pogge, *The Individual Deprivation Measure: A Gender-Sensitive Approach to Poverty Measurement*, International Women’s Development Agency, Melbourne, 2013.

⁹ Ministerial Declaration of the 2016 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council on the theme “Ensuring that no one is left behind” Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Segment of the 2016 session of the Council on the annual theme “Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results”

¹⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, *Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level: report of the Secretary-General*, A/70/684

Issues of Availability and Cost for Community and Advocacy Organisations

ERA is in regular contact with researchers who have raised the following issues on data availability and cost:

- Available data on migrants, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and culturally and linguistically diverse people in the Survey on Income and Housing (SIH), the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) and the Census is restricted for privacy reasons, making it difficult to gain an understanding of settlement issues and comparing these populations to the general population.

Which rules, regulations or policies create unnecessary or excessive barriers to linking datasets? How can Australia's government agencies improve their sharing and linking of public sector data? What lessons or examples from overseas should be considered?

- Seeking Ethics Approval of data from multiple sites leads to delays, stifling of innovation amongst academics, extra costs and reduced resources to analyse the data when all the time is spent applying and responding to Ethics Committees. Researchers should be able to apply to one Ethics Committee which should then be accepted across Australia without having to seek approval from other Ethics Committees. Streamlined national guidelines would be helpful when wishing to analyse routine collected datasets. The National Health and Medical Research Council has identified jurisdictions moving towards streamlining.¹¹

What public sector datasets should be considered high-value data to the: business sector; research sector; academics; or the broader community?

- Gender-specific data from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), Repatriation Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits (RPBS), Medicare data and all ABS data.

Recommendations:

Equality Rights Alliance recommends that the Productivity Commission examine the following issues with a view to recommending action from Government on-

1. Options for the restitution of the *Tracking Equity* report.
2. Ensuring regular and systematic collection of time-use data.
3. Participation in voluntary national reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹¹ K Pittman, *Streamlining scientific and ethics review of multi-centre health and medical research in Australia*, Report to the NHMRC, 2007.

References

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