

# Empowering Parents and Caregivers through Gender-Responsive Family Policies

A Moldovan  
Case Study



**Expanding  
Choices** through  
Family-Friendly Policies



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 Austrian  
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In the Republic of Moldova, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work limits women's full participation in the labour force. As of 2012, World Bank data showed that women in the Republic of Moldova were spending a fifth of their day on unpaid domestic and care work, nearly double the 11.3 per cent of their day that men dedicated to these tasks.<sup>1</sup> This disparity hampers women's opportunities to engage in full-time or higher-paying jobs.

While the labour force participation rates of men in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region align with global trends, the figures for women display significant variation. Though some countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia traditionally show a high rate of women's participation in paid employment, the labour force participation rate of women in the Republic of Moldova stands at a relatively low 54 per cent. This discrepancy underscores the challenges women face in reconciling unpaid work responsibilities with accessing labour market opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

To address this issue, the Expanding Choices project in the Republic of Moldova adopts a

## rights-based and **gender-transformative approach**

This approach seeks to challenge and alter entrenched harmful gender norms and power structures that restrict women's choices and opportunities. It strives to foster women's economic empowerment and gender equality by advocating for women's rights and agency, including their right to work, access education and training, and participate in decision-making processes.

1. World Bank, "Moldova", Gender Data Portal. Available at <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/moldova/#:-:text=In%202012%2C%20women%20in%20Moldova,their%20day%20on%20unpaid%20work> (accessed on 4 July 2023).

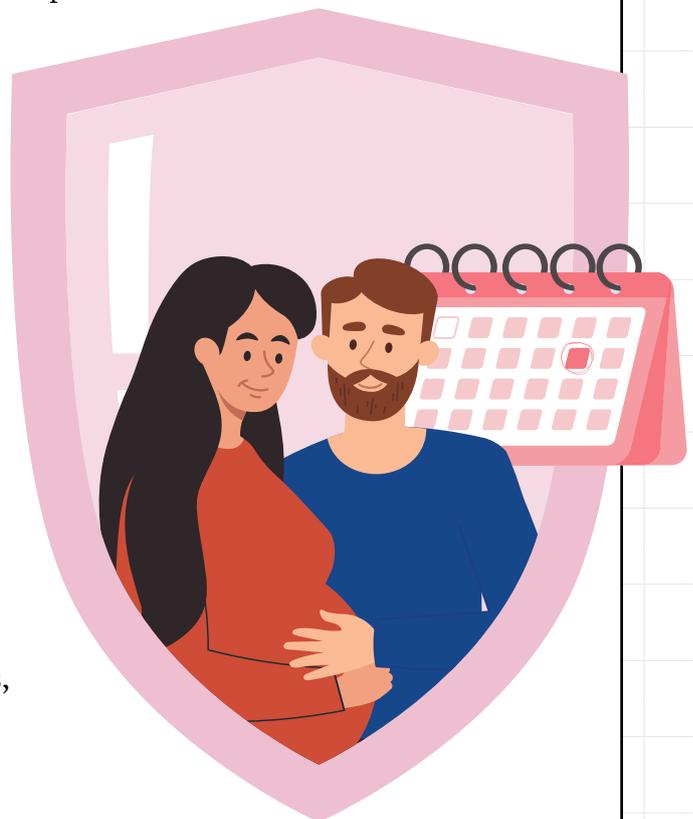
2. Sara Cantillon and Nina Teasdale, *Empowering women through reducing unpaid work: a regional analysis of Europe and Central Asia* (Geneva and New York, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and UN Women, 2021).

## Policy reforms and legislation

The Expanding Choices project is instrumental in bringing about impactful policy changes and legislation, with a focus on fostering strong partnerships, promoting public awareness and driving legislative reform. The project's strategy is pivotal in effectuating meaningful policy changes and legislation, while maintaining a strong network of partnerships and actively raising public awareness.

Significant legislative changes have been realized through the efforts of the project, positively affecting families and caregivers. These include Law No. 195, which allowed shared childcare leave and introduced a higher-income, shorter-term childcare allowance; Law No. 367, which established alternative childcare services; and Law No. 353, which modified maternity leave provisions and ensured that pregnant women could continue earning during maternity leave, calculating maternity indemnity from the highest parental income. Working in close coordination with key stakeholders, the project managed to reshape the Republic of Moldova's national gender-responsive family policies, resulting in far-reaching impacts that benefit the entire population.

To achieve these impacts, the project formed strategic alliances with key entities such as the Women's Caucus of the 11th legislature in the Republic of Moldova, leading to the passage of a law promoting women's economic empowerment. These alliances extend to government entities, with the project emphasizing coordination between the private and public sectors, and holding regular discussions on proposed laws and project progress.



Such dialogues often include key government officials and members of parliament, and serve as an effective platform to discuss draft laws designed to support working parents and caregivers.

The Expanding Choices project prioritizes data and evidence to inform its interventions and monitor progress towards its goals. Research and analysis are conducted to identify the gender gaps and barriers hindering women's economic empowerment and work-life balance. This approach, combined with a partnership with the government, ultimately led to legislative changes promoting shared responsibility for childcare between parents.

To ensure that these policy changes are impactful, the project has invested in widespread public awareness campaigns. The “Be an informed parent, know your rights” campaign, for example, successfully reached 2,000 individuals in person and tens of thousands more online, educating them about the rights and options offered to parents by the state. The campaign, conducted across 36 districts and municipalities through 41 information meetings, effectively used a blend of communication channels and print materials to raise awareness of parental rights and benefits. This comprehensive strategy, an integral part of the Expanding Choices project's approach, aims not only to raise awareness but also to

encourage more fathers to  
take **paternity leave and  
childcare leave.**

Through its coordinated efforts with key actors and the use of data, the Expanding Choices project has successfully enacted policy changes that have the potential to greatly impact families and caregivers in the Republic of Moldova. Its ongoing work to inform the public ensures that these changes are understood and utilized by those they are intended to benefit.

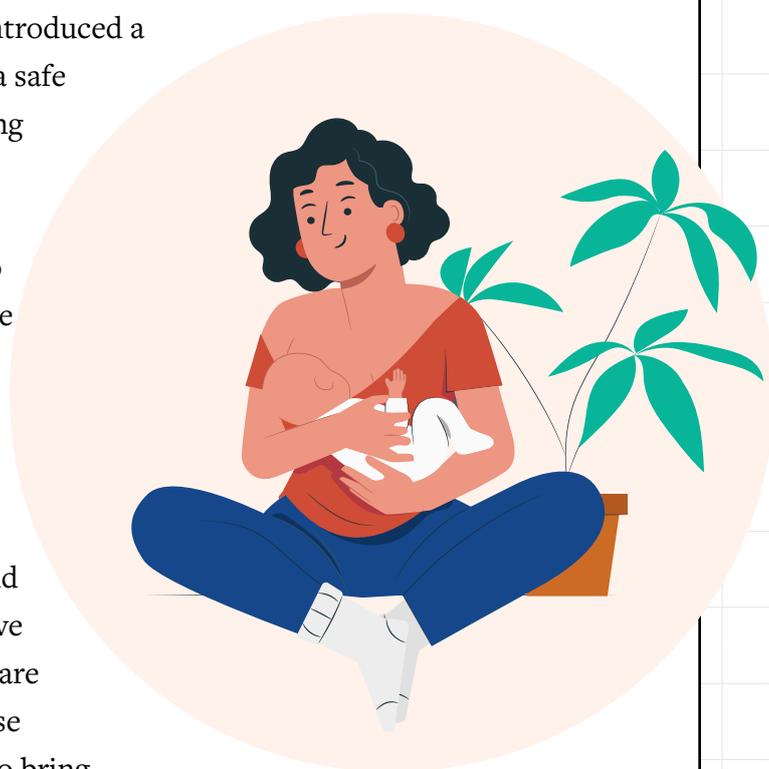
## Private sector involvement and workplace initiatives

The Expanding Choices project in the Republic of Moldova successfully partnered with five champion companies: Asena Textil, Orange Moldova, Panilino, Premier Energy Distribution and Linella. These companies have made significant strides in promoting family-friendly and gender-inclusive initiatives and advancing gender equality within the private sector.

Orange Moldova, for instance, introduced a breastfeeding corner, providing a safe and comfortable space for nursing mothers in the workplace. This initiative not only supports the well-being of employees but also encourages women's labour force participation by addressing one of the barriers faced by working mothers.

Other champion companies, such as Asena Textil, Panilino and Premier Energy Distribution, have established child rooms or day-care centres near their factories. These dedicated spaces allow parents to bring their children to work, providing convenience and peace of mind. By facilitating childcare arrangements, these companies have actively contributed to fostering a supportive work environment and enabling employees to balance their professional and parental responsibilities effectively.

Furthermore, Orange Moldova, in collaboration with the project, launched a fathers' club, which promotes active fatherhood and equal parenting. This club serves as a platform for fathers to share experiences, challenges and best practices related to balancing work and family life. By encouraging men's



involvement in childcare and promoting gender equality, the club contributes to creating a more inclusive work culture.

These tangible examples of family-friendly initiatives in the private sector highlight the transformative impact of the Expanding Choices project. By partnering with champion companies, the project has facilitated the

implementation of practical measures that support working parents, **promote gender equality and enhance women's labour force participation.**

These achievements serve as inspiring examples for other companies in the Republic of Moldova and beyond, showcasing the benefits of creating supportive and inclusive workplaces.

The private sector's involvement in the Expanding Choices project has been dynamic, fostering a culture of gender equality and strengthening socioeconomic links through various initiatives. Using UNFPA and UN Women's established methodology for creating and facilitating fathers' clubs, the project supported the establishment of a fathers' club at Orange Moldova. The club has become an inclusive space where men can actively participate in caregiving and gender equality discussions, highlighting their crucial role in challenging stereotypes and preventing gender-based violence.

While the promotion of family-friendly workplaces has brought about significant changes within individual companies, the Expanding Choices project also ensures that these conversations are taking place on a broader scale. It showcases its achievements at events such as the Made in Moldova exhibition, where a round-table discussion titled "Investment in People — Investment in Company Success" linked legislative reform, caregiving responsibility and economic prosperity, reinforcing the importance of family-friendly policies

for corporate success. Additionally, the project organizes public awareness campaigns and events like the International Day of Families celebration, in collaboration with champion companies like Panilino, to enhance public understanding of gender equality, care work stereotypes and family-friendly policies. Furthermore, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Moldova actively promotes gender-sensitive family policies in the private sector by organizing events and encouraging knowledge exchange among its members. These industry-level efforts stress the significance of gender-responsive policies for the development of the Republic of Moldova's private sector.

Public visibility and commitment play a crucial role in bolstering the impact of the project. Media outreach has been instrumental in the project's success, with high-level senior management from various champion companies publicly committing to creating family-friendly workplaces. One example that highlights the impact of these commitments is Diana Donțu, the Executive Director of Panilino, who balances her demanding career with being the mother of triplets. Donțu's story, which has been widely shared, showcases how gender-responsive family policies can enable caregivers to reconcile professional and family responsibilities, largely due to the supportive involvement of her partner and the flexibility of her employer. This commitment and the stories of its impact were broadcast in Romanian and Russian, thereby increasing public awareness of the project's initiatives and their positive impacts.



The project is not just about implementing existing guidelines but also about creating new paths for corporate social responsibility. Tailored partnerships are formed to meet the unique needs of companies, demonstrating the importance of addressing different workforce demographics.

The Expanding Choices project builds a network of strategic alliances to achieve its goals. Strategic alliances are built to integrate gender-responsive family policies into the national road map on women's economic empowerment through the Republic of Moldova's Secretariat of the Economic Council. The project's resilience, even in the face of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, is a testament to the robust relationships forged with key government, private sector and civil society stakeholders. Collaboration with influential local partners like the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Centre for Partnership for Development help

**further enhance local competencies in the area of gender-responsive family policies and tailor activities to unique contexts.**

Collaboration is not confined to local partnerships: the project fosters cross-sectoral cooperation that goes beyond geographical boundaries. A diverse range of stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities and international development partners, contribute their unique expertise, resources and networks to further the project's goals.

## Social inclusion and diversity

The Expanding Choices project actively incorporates social inclusion and diversity by focusing on revisions in policy and targeted research. It ensures recognition of diverse caregiving responsibilities in the Republic of Moldova by revising policies to include specific provisions for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities. The project also publicizes experiences from the region through a series of stories, highlighting the experiences of employees with disabilities from participating companies, demonstrating the inclusive nature of family-friendly workplaces.

### **Advocating for inclusion: how the Expanding Choices project empowered Ludmila David**

Ludmila David is a 44-year-old widowed mother of two who is suffering from the effects of polio. Despite her physical challenges, Ludmila moved to Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, to work as a customer agent operator at the telecommunications company Orange in 2019.

Ludmila's story captures the ethos of the Expanding Choices project. Overcoming societal prejudices and personal limitations, she was welcomed into a workplace designed with employees' well-being in mind, including the well-being of those with disabilities or specific needs. The support from her colleagues and the inclusive climate at Orange helped her not only achieve financial independence but also more fully integrate into society.

"I am glad that I haven't felt discriminated against at work, but I also want to mention that I am interested in doing my job well," Ludmila remarks.

She appreciates that the value employees with disabilities add to the company is being recognized, affirming their contribution to the organization's growth and development.

Ludmila's experience underpins the importance of family-friendly workplace policies. According to her, these policies have the potential to motivate more women, including those with disabilities, to actively participate in the labour market while managing their familial responsibilities. Her story serves as a testament to the project's mission of championing social inclusion, diversity and equal caregiving responsibilities in the Moldovan workforce.

## **Advocacy, campaigns and public awareness**

The Expanding Choices project has achieved significant milestones in fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for gender equality and equal caregiving roles. By adopting innovative communication and advocacy strategies, the project effectively raises awareness, challenges societal norms, and fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment for gender equality and equal caregiving roles. This has already resulted in a positive shift in attitudes and behaviours, contributing to greater gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace and beyond. Leveraging digital media and community mobilization, the project targets diverse societal sectors, recognizing the importance of engaging a wide range of audiences through suitable and creative means. One of the notable challenges the project addresses is the societal resistance to men assuming larger roles in unpaid care work. To overcome this resistance, the project employs targeted communication and advocacy efforts, collaborating with community leaders and opinion makers to emphasize the advantages of equal caregiving roles.

**UNFPA's Expanding Choices project works in partnership with the Moldovan Government to enact legislation supporting a more **balanced distribution** of unpaid care work.**

**Measures encompass paternity leave, flexible working hours and support for childcare services.**

In parallel, the project encourages the private sector to incorporate gender-responsive family policies, such as on-site childcare facilities and flexible work arrangements. Media campaigns, community mobilization, and engagement with men and boys are instrumental in promoting a shift in social norms around gender roles and unpaid care work.

More than a thousand participants attended information sessions designed

to raise awareness of gender equality, labour relations, social leave and other family-related benefits. Conducted by experts from public authorities, civil society and academia, these sessions ensured that employees were well informed about their rights and entitlements. The positive feedback from attendees is a clear signal of the project's success.

Further extending its reach, the project also contributes to comparative studies such as an analysis of the Republic of Moldova's national legislation vis-à-vis the EU work-life balance directive, a study on the gender wage gap in the Republic of Moldova and a policy analysis in Albania. Such efforts deepen understanding of and commitment to gender-responsive family policies.

Members of parliament and the National Social Insurance House of Moldova were engaged in a broad communication campaign promoting gender-responsive family policies, reaching over 17,000 people both in person and online. The project also developed an online platform to provide women with information on work-life balance and women's rights, facilitating networking and peer support among women entrepreneurs and workers. This inclusive approach extends to the information sessions, involving a broad range of stakeholders, which have been effective in delivering trustworthy and comprehensive information to employees.

The Expanding Choices project has notably reshaped the Republic of Moldova's gender dynamics by promoting gender equality, policy reforms and shared domestic caregiving responsibilities. The project's rights-based, gender-transformative approach, strategic alliances and focus on social inclusion are driving significant legislative reforms, public awareness and private sector involvement. The experiences of individuals like Ludmila David highlight the role of inclusive workplaces in social resilience and economic prosperity. The project remains committed to consolidation, adaptation and the expansion of its scope in response to the evolving social and economic landscape.

