

CHILDCARE,
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT
AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19:
THE CASE OF MOLDOVA



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Lead author: Liliana Palihovici

UN Women team: Svetlana Andrieș, Olga Melniciuc, Olesea Simion, Nargis Azizova, Sara Cantillon

UNECE team: Malinka Koparanova, Silke Steinhilber

Design: Natalia Tighineanu

Cover photo credit: UN Women Moldova/Andrei Bogus

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ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	SARS-CoV2 Respiratory Virus
CPD	Center “Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare” Public Association
CCF	“Child, Community and Family “Public Association
EEI	Early Education Institution
ENPHC	Extraordinary National Public Health Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
LPA	Local Public Authority
MECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
MHLSP	Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
UN Women	United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
WB	World Bank

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis and one of the greatest tests that Moldova is currently facing. Although it started as a health crisis, it resulted in major repercussions on the social protection and assistance system, causing large disruptions in economic activity and limiting social life to dangerous levels.

Since March 2020, the public administration system operates in a continuous state of emergency to provide solutions to the problems generated by the crisis. The government implemented a series of countermeasures to reduce the rate of infection with the new virus, but the effectiveness of most of these interventions was proven to be far lower than originally planned. A reason for this failure is that the decision-making mechanism is not transparent and does not involve all the stakeholders in the process of identifying the most appropriate solutions. Thus, the proposed actions did not cover the specific needs of different population groups. The generalized approach resulted in the deepening of inequalities and increased the poverty risk for many population groups, which were already facing a range of challenges before the pandemic. Measures that have been imposed to reduce the spread of the virus had undesirable effects on the level of economic development, tax collection, and investment. However, the pandemic crisis has generated higher pending in the areas of health, education, care, and social protection.

The pandemic had a detrimental impact on

women living in Moldova, who even before the pandemic faced several inequalities that limited their opportunities for social, economic, and political participation, inequalities that are generated by gender stereotypes that became even more evident during the pandemic. This study looks at the impact of the pandemic on Moldovan women, specifically, the changes that have taken place in the labor market and to what extent did they affect women's employment and welfare. The topic is analyzed in conjunction with other issues, such as access to public services that must exist and facilitate women's economic activism. It is noteworthy that, from the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a decrease in the employment rate of women in the labor market. This was largely dictated by the closure of preschool education services, which put several families in the position to choose which of the parents would leave work to care for their children. The study examines existing pre-school education services, including the coverage rate at the national level, the accessibility for families with children, and how they operate and are funded. A part of this study is dedicated to the analysis of gender stereotypes and how they influence the employment of women during the pandemic in Moldova. It also reviews the government's plans for economic recovery and provides a series of recommendations that promote women's economic participation and gender-sensitive policies to address Moldova's economic problems.

SUMMARY

The Republic of Moldova has made international and national commitments to promote gender equality and to facilitate the empowerment of women. Actions have been taken to follow these commitments and, to a certain extent, progress was achieved.

Despite the positive changes in the national legislation and the efforts made to improve women's welfare in Moldova, certain vulnerabilities and gaps are still to be addressed. The Moldovan society shares strong gender stereotypes, and the perceptions of traditional gender roles are still deeply rooted in the mentality of most individuals.

Women in Moldova face specific labor market barriers. Persistent patriarchal attitudes and the insufficient development of care services limit their employment options, a fact confirmed by the employment rate. In 2019 the employment rate of women aged between 25-49 years old, with children aged between 0-6 years, was 39.4%, by 23.1% lower than that of men with children in the same age group. In contrast, the employment rate of women without children (25-49 years) was 62.9% with 6.4% higher than the employment rate of men without children¹.

Assessments of the COVID-19 impact on women show that the pandemic worsened the inequalities related to sharing the care responsibilities. The institutional measures taken to stop the spread of the virus included the suspension of childcare services, thus the burden of care activities

moved automatically onto the household members, particularly on women. More than 51.2% of women reported that, during the pandemic, the number of hours dedicated to schoolwork with children was higher and 54% of them mentioned that they are generally spending more time for household-related activities². Household responsibilities account for the largest share of the day of a woman – 4.6 hours among the total population and 3.8 hours among employed women. Men mostly use the largest share of their time for paid work – 3.9 hours on average among the total population.

In the second quarter of 2020, 30.9% of women were affected in some form by the pandemic at the workplace, versus only 18.5% of men. At the same time, in 2020, the higher share of NEET women aged 15-29 (40,3% versus 21,2% NEET men)³ suggests more women are at risk of facing difficult job market prospects. Moreover, employed women face wage disparities that represent, in 2020, 14.1%⁴, and women represent the vast majority of the population employed in lower-paying occupations women in education 82.2%, health and social assistance sector - 80.2%.

Analyzing the income sources for both women and men during the pandemic we find another series of economic vulnerabilities. Men receive more income from productive activities, while women – from social allowances and remittances. Women are twice as dependent on remittances compared to men.⁵

The pandemic crisis in Moldova has affected women and men differently, in terms of employment, income, and distribution of parenting responsibilities, thus reducing their wellbeing and safety. Unfortunately, the policy responses did not have a specific approach, tailored for each affected area and vulnerable group. The analyzed data shows that the government's efforts to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic did not address the specific problems that women and other vulnerable groups face. Therefore, the inequalities in care responsibilities within families have increased, the employment rate of women has decreased, consequently decreasing their incomes, and the entrepreneurial activity of women has been greatly affected.

To avoid the further aggravation of the current problems, the Government should adjust its decision-making mechanisms to consult all relevant stakeholders in the process of developing anti-crisis measures, thus ensuring that the specific needs of

different groups are met more efficiently. The Government should also: a) ensure that the gender equality principles are incorporated in all implemented policies; b) allow rapid interventions and reallocation of funds to cover the real needs of the population, especially of the vulnerable groups including families with children, during crises; c) develop childcare services designed to offer services also in times of crisis; d) launch mechanisms for encouraging the business environment to invest in the childcare system, thus creating premises for increasing the employment rate of women and men with children. National mechanisms are needed to be developed and implemented to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including discrimination in the labor market. Partnerships with CSOs active in the gender equality area should also be established as they are essential for mainstreaming the collective efforts of providing assistance to the most vulnerable groups.

¹ National Bureau of Statistics https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/50%20Statistica%20gender/50%20Statistica%20gender_GEN01/GEN010590mun.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774

² UN Women, CPD, Assessment of Covid-19 impact on gender roles. 2020 https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Studiu_Impact_COVID_corectat.pdf

³ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6934>

⁴ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6934>

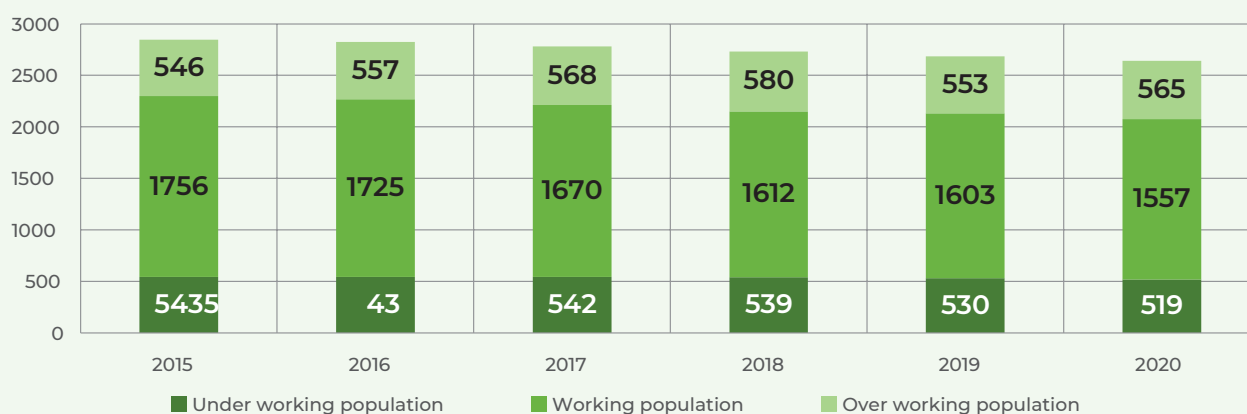
⁵ UN Women. CPD. Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. 2020. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20moldova/attachments/publications/2020/un%20woman%20en%20240820.pdf?la=en&vs=38>

1. COUNTRY SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The Republic of Moldova is a small country with a population of 2,640,438 inhabitants (women-51.9% and 48.1% men), with a lower-middle-income economy that is among the poorest countries in Europe. The economic growth of Moldova is somewhere between 4% to 5% annually, most of which is made up by the growing domestic consumption and foreign remittances.

The working-age population has registered a negative trend, with an annual compound decrease of 2.37%, which has cumulated in the past 5 years in an 11% decrease in the total number of working-age individuals. This decline has been triggered mostly by the large-scale emigration of people seeking better working conditions and higher incomes.

Population with permanent residence in Moldova (thousand)



The Republic of Moldova faces several challenges in its path towards sustainable development, which include a volatile political establishment, a polarized society, low levels of labor productivity, high levels of structural unemployment, and demographic challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the Moldavian economy at a time when it was already decelerating. In the last financial quarter of 2019, the economy has registered a standstill which contributed to the lower

year-on-year economic growth of 3.6% registered in 2019. The economic growth has slowed further at the beginning of 2020 with a registered 0.9% growth compared to the previous period. The slowdown was caused by a fall both in exports and domestic consumption. Nonetheless, the investments in fixed assets have remained stable, mostly because of the subsidy programs (e.g., First House Program⁶) in the construction sector. However, in the second

⁶ National Programme First House - <http://primacasa.gov.md/>

quarter of 2020, the GDP has plummeted by 17% compared to 2019, with a fall of around 15% in investments and a 17% decrease in domestic consumption. The economic shock is also reflected in the fall of the inflation rate (2.3% in September 2020) and the record low policy rate of 2.75% set by the Bank of Moldova. The only positive trend was recorded in the net exports made by the Republic of Moldova, mostly because the exports did not fall proportionally with the imports that have plummeted due to the decrease in domestic consumption.

The crisis will also weigh in on the financial markets. New loans have decreased by 8.3% (May 2020), since the peak registered in December 2019, while the inflow of deposits has been slashed by one-third. Nonetheless, the deposit stock in 2020 is still higher by around 2% compared to stock at the end of the 2019 financial year. The deposit stock shows the growing confidence of the people of Moldova in the banking sector, which is a welcomed trend after the 2014 banking crisis. However, with the current evolution of the pandemic, we could see a downfall in

the deposit stock in the data presented at the end of 2020.

The economy was helped to cope with the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by the fiscal prudence approach that the authorities traditionally have (mostly due to the conditions imposed by the strategic partners) and external financing. Public debt is 32,9% % of GDP⁷, which leaves room for a policy response to the pandemic.

Economic recovery of Moldova will most likely depend on the recovery of the rest of the world. Due to the high levels of remittances that have been growing in the last decade, we could expect that an increase in domestic consumption will most likely happen with the recovery of the western economies from which most of the remittances arrive. Predictions show that the negative trend will continue until the vaccination programs will be implemented in full effect around the globe.

⁷ <https://mf.gov.md/ro/datoria-sectorului-public/rapoarte/datoria-de-stat>

Table 1.

General Macroeconomic Data

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
GDP growth	4.4	4.7	4.3	3.6	-7
Inflation (average)	6.4	6.6	3.1	3.8	3.5
Government balance/GDP	-1.5	-0.6	-0.8	-1.4	-8
Current account balance/GDP	-3.5	-5.7	-10.4	-9.3	-7
Net FDI/GDP [neg. Sign = inflows]	-0.9	-1.4	-2.2	-3.9	2.1
External debt/GDP	75	70.6	63.9	62	70.1
Gross reserves/GDP	27.3	29	26.1	25.6	30
Credit to private sector/GDP	21.6	18.7	18.4	19.2	27.8

Source : Moldovan authorities (MEI, MF, NBM)

Childcare and Early Education in the Republic of Moldova

To better understand to what extent women in Moldova enjoy or not equal and equitable rights and opportunities for social, economic, and political participation, it is important to analyze more aspects of public policies promoted by the state in this field. The COVID-19 pandemic deepened gender inequalities and generated new economic, social, and psychological challenges for many women in Moldova. During this period, the lackings of policies and existing mechanisms for promoting gender equality have become even more visible. For example, more women were forced to change their work schedule during the March to November 2020 period, or even to leave work because childcare services were closed and no other alternatives existed. As a result, many families with children, both in urban and rural areas have been affected significantly. The issue insufficiency of childcare services is not new to Moldova, and the need to expand and diversify these services has been debated for several years by the civil society and the business community.

Presently, childcare policies in the Republic of Moldova include two dimensions of intervention: 1) educational; 2) child social protection. On the educational dimension, childcare is part of the early education services, while on the social protection dimension, children are covered by alternative social services and cash benefits offered to families.

Early education services in Moldova represent an educational process carried out with children aged between 0 and 6 (7

years in educational institutions or within the family, for them to develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially⁸. Early education is considered as the first stage of the educational and training system which is carried out in institutions of various types and the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research is the responsible authority for developing the system and policies for these institutions (curriculum, educational process, teacher training). The responsibility for the operational and financial management of these services is delegated to the tier 1 LPAs, which are entitled to establish, reorganize, and close the early education institutions located on the territory that they administer according to the needs of the community.

The organization and functioning of early education institutions, regardless of the organizational form and legal status, is carried out under the national educational policy and child protection legislation⁹. At the same time, the main regulations governing the activity of pre-school institutions are stipulated in the Standard Regulation on the organization and functioning of the early education institutions¹⁰.

Childcare services in Moldova are mostly developed by the public authorities and it should be noted that at this stage these services are unattractive for private sector investments due to the complicated technical requirements. As a consequence, the private sector investments in early

⁸ Code of Education no. 152 of July 17, 2014. https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=110112&lang=ro

education institutions are insignificant. This aspect was pointed by the Employers' Association during the dialogue with the Government, which called for the Standard Regulation and the Sanitary Regulation

to be amended, in order to encourage companies that have the potential to set up childcare services for parents working in these companies.

The structure and forms of organization of early education

Early education in Moldova is conducted in two cycles: pre-preschool education for children of 0 to 2 years old and preschool education, for children 2 to 6(7) years old¹¹. Early education institutions are of several types, and depending on the age and the needs of the children, they are classified as follows:

- 1) **Nurseries** – pre-preschool education institutions with a full-day¹² program, intended for children of up to 2 years old, which offer educational services and, depending on the specific needs of children, care services according to the standard package of services, established by the Government.
- 2) **Kindergartens** - preschool educational institutions with a full-day program (for children of 2-6 (7) years old), which provide educational services and, depending on the specific needs of children, care and protection according to the standard package of services, established by the Government.
- 3) **Community centers** - early education public institutions with a full-day program (nurseries and preschool institutions), created by the LPA at the local level. These provide educational services and, where appropriate, care for children of up to 2 years and from 2 to 6 (7) years, respectively, who do not attend an early

education institution. These centers, in particular, provide services in support of disadvantaged families¹³.

- 4) **Educational complexes with combined programs** (preschool-primary schools, preschool-gymnasiums) - institutions with a full-day program, opened under conditions of sufficient demand for gathering optimal groups of children. Kindergartens-nurseries can also be established - with nursery groups for children under 2 years and preschool groups for children aged 2-6 (7) years, in compliance with the sanitary and psychopedagogical norms specific to this age groups. Groups for children aged 0-2

⁹ Code of Education no. 152 of July 17, 2014; Law no. 436-XVI of December 28, 2006 on local public administration; Law no. 435-XVI of December 28, 2006 on administrative decentralization; Law no. 338-XIII of December 15, 1994, on child rights; Health Care Law no. 411-XIII of March 28, 1995; Law no. 10-XVI of 03.02.2009 on state supervision of public health; Labor Code no. 154-XV of March 28, 2003, and other legislative acts, decisions, ordinances, and dispositions of the Government; orders of the Ministry of Education; decisions of the local public administration and other normative acts in the field of education

¹⁰ Government Decision no. 1211 of 04.11.2016 on the approval of the Sanitary Regulation for early education institutions, and Order of the Ministry of Education no. 254 of 11.10.2017

¹¹ Code of Education, Article.20 (1), (a) modified by LP269 dated 23.11.18, MO467-179/14.12.18

¹² Full-day program means 12 hours in municipalities and 9 hours in rural area

¹³ The Law on social assistance no 547/2003: "disadvantaged person and family" - socially vulnerable person and family, in situations, that obstruct their normal activity from an economic, educational, social, etc. point of view

years cannot be set up in primary schools or gymnasiums.

- 5) **Specialized early education institutions include: residential institutions (for children up to 6/7 years old):** for orphans or those left without parental care; **special early education institutions** for children with severe disabilities; **sanatorium institutions** for children with chronic diseases; **penitentiary institutions for women** where nurseries are opened for children of up to 2 years old and kindergarten-nurseries for children aged from 2-3 years;

Depending on the type of property, public early education institutions are created by the decision of the local public authorities,

and private institutions, are created by the decision of a private founder.

The public institutions for early education (nurseries and pre-school education institutions) and extracurricular education (at the local level) are established, reorganized, and closed by the tier 1 local public authorities. The local public authorities must ensure the proper functioning of these institutions under the regulations and standards approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research. At the same time, the founding local public authorities are obliged to establish school districts for each public preschool educational institution.

Financing

Public preschool education institutions are financed from special-purpose transfers made from the state budget to local budgets. State funding of the preschool education for children of 2 to 3 years old, has been gradually implemented since January 2019, according to the program approved by the Government and depending on the number of places available in early education and general education institutions, as well as the financial means available.

State expenditures for education in 2020 constituted 6.1% of GDP, amounting to 12.583.200¹⁴ thousand MDL, of which around 27% were allocated for early education services.

According to the Model Regulation of the early education institutions, the public institutions for early education (nurseries, community centers for early education) are financed from the budgets of tier

1 or tier 2 LPAs¹⁵. At the same time, the public preschool education institutions (kindergarten, community centers for early education) operate with funding from the state budget through special-purpose transfers to the budgets of tier 1 or tier 2 local public authorities. Responsibility for funding the pre-preschool education institutions is placed strictly on local public authorities, which are constantly in a budget deficit and cannot afford to provide such services. This explains such a large discrepancy between the pre-preschool services developed in urban and rural areas. In villages where there is no possibility of accumulating enough income in the local budgets, the chances of families to benefit from pre-

¹⁴ https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatia_editia_2021.pdf

¹⁵ The standard regulation of the early education institution: https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/reg-tip_iet_14.11.2017_rom.pdf

preschool services for their children of up to 2 years old are minimal, traditionally forcing women, but in some cases men as well, from these communities to stay at home and take care for their children, therefore limiting their employment opportunities.

Private early education and pre-school institutions may be established, reorganized, and liquidated according to the legal framework provided by the Civil Code, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, and the Standard Regulation for the early education institutions. These institutions are organized according to the non-profit principle and should meet the same criteria, standards, and performance indicators as public educational units. However, private institutions benefit from organizational and financial autonomy compared to their public counterparts. The financing of private early education and pre-school education institutions is sourced out of the investments of the founders and the tuition fees paid by the parents. The mentioned aspect of the non-profit principle makes this sector unattractive for most private investors, and the provision for such services is often challenging for a poor state, which fails in most cases to develop services that will meet the needs of all children aged 0 to 7 years. In 2020, out of the total of 1485 of active early education institutions, only 15¹⁶ were private institutions which were attended by a total of 1.1 thousand children (grew by of 4.7% comparing to 2019). In a country where early pre-preschool services have relatively low coverage, encouraging the private sector to invest in this area is a must.

In Moldova, pre-preschool education can be provided in the family, which benefits from direct funding from the national public budget. It is considered that the child-

raising allowance offered to each family also covers the expenses of pre-preschool education within the family. For this reason, the state budget does not co-finance nurseries and the responsibility of opening and financing such institutions is at the discretion of tier 1 local public authorities (town halls). At the request of the parents, local public authorities can organize early education services, with funding from local budgets.

The enrolment of children in the preschool education institutions is done upon request, for all the children in the corresponding school district. Expenditures for preschool education and care services in public institutions for all children, including children with special educational needs are paid by the state.

The payment for early education services provided by public institutions is mostly covered by the state budget and LPAs, but families also contribute through a monthly payment. The payment for the kindergarten requires the parents' contribution of 30% of the cost for the daily feeding of the children (4 meals and one snack per day in Chisinau and 3 meals and one snack in the rural area), plus 10 MDL (0.5 euro) for each day attended by the child. 70% of the cost for food in kindergartens are covered by the state budget and in nurseries - by LPAs (see table 2). The LPAs also finance the costs of maintenance and administration of nurseries, and the state budget covers these costs for kindergarten. Usually, families with many children, or low-income families, or any other types of vulnerability are exempt from this payment, the expenses being fully covered

¹⁶ National Bureau of Statistics <https://statistica.gov.md/news-view.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

from public funds, based on the decision of the Local Public Authorities. In private institutions, the monthly payment for early education services is fully covered by the family. For this reason, private services are mostly accessible only to middle- and high-income families. According to an

evaluation conducted by UNICEF in 2018,¹⁷ it was found that 76.8% of parents are paying additionally for early education activities, such as foreign languages courses, computer skills, sports, and other activities that are not included in the educational offer of the kindergarten.

Table 2.

Share of costs payed by public funds and parents

Type of Payer	Nursery (0-2 years)		Kindergarten (2-7years)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Central Govt			~70% for meal and addition cost for kindergarten functioning	
Local Govt	~70% for meal and addition cost for nursery functioning			
Parents	up to 30% for the meals and 10 MDL per day for each day the child attended nursery	100%	up to 30% for the meals and 10 MDL per day for each day the child attended kindergarten	100%

Coverage of early, pre-school, and primary education services

The network of early education services in the Republic of Moldova has national coverage and the Government has invested considerably in its rehabilitation throughout the last 7 years. At the end of 2020, there were 1485 early education institutions in the Republic of Moldova (see table 3), 7.5% (103 institutions) more than in 2010¹⁸. Out of the total early education institutions, only 15 institutions were private. In 2019, about three-quarters of

early education institutions were located in rural areas¹⁹ and operated on a 5-day working program.

¹⁷ UNICEF. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care. 2018

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and National Bureau of Statistics

¹⁹ Activity report of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research for 2019. https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_de_activitate_al_mecc_pentru_anul_2019.pdf

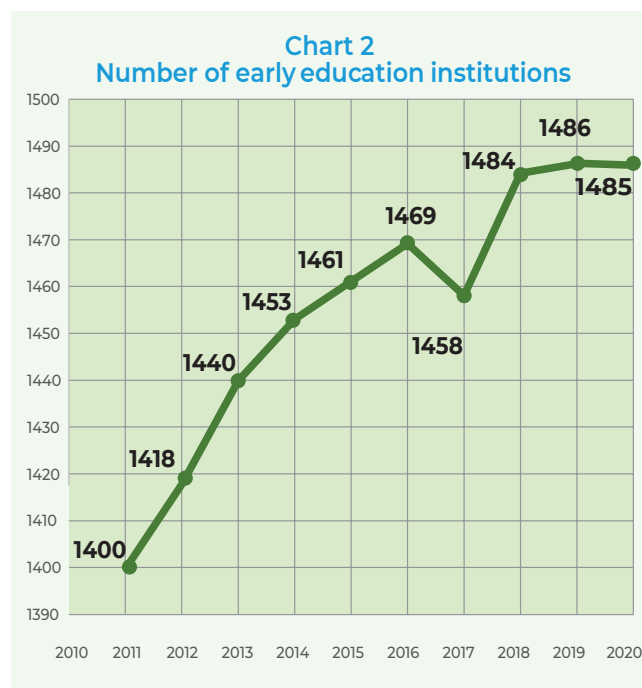
Table 3.

Early education Institutions²⁰

	2017		2018		2019		Total	Including rural
	Total	Including rural	Total	Including rural	Total	Including rural		
Total no. of institutions	1458	1128	1484	1138	1486	1139	1485	1133
Kindergartens	529	507	541	511	543	516	568	531
Nursery-kindergartens	833	540	835	540	829	530	808	514
Nursery	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0
Kindergarten -schools	73	60	83	67	89	73	90	73
Community centers	21	21	23	20	23	20	17	15

The enrolment rate in preschool education institutions, for children aged 3-6 years, was 95.6% in 2019. At first glance, it seems that childcare services have very good coverage around the country. But if we will add the number of children in villages and towns aged 0-3 years, then the coverage rate decreases dramatically. If we talk about the coverage rate of the pre-preschool education services (nurseries), for children from 0 to the age of 3 years, then the rate is much lower than that for children aged 3 to 6 years. The maximum enrolment share reached in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic was 25.9% (see chart 3²¹).

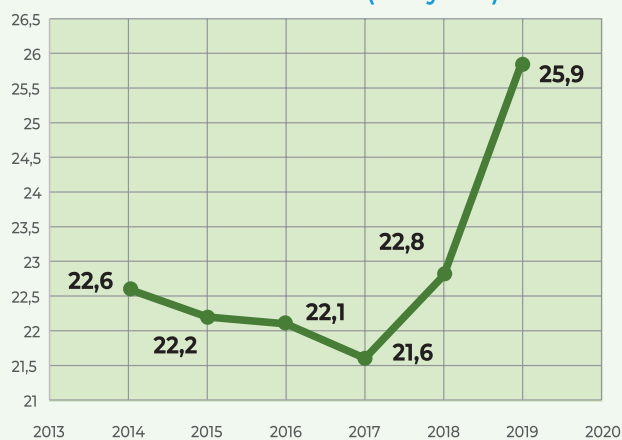
In Chisinau, the enrollment rate of children up to 3 years old in early education institutions is below the country average. The analysis of the aggregated data on the national scale shows that the average



²⁰ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

²¹ National Bureau of Statistics.

Chart 3 Gross enrollment rate in early childhood education (0 -3 years) %

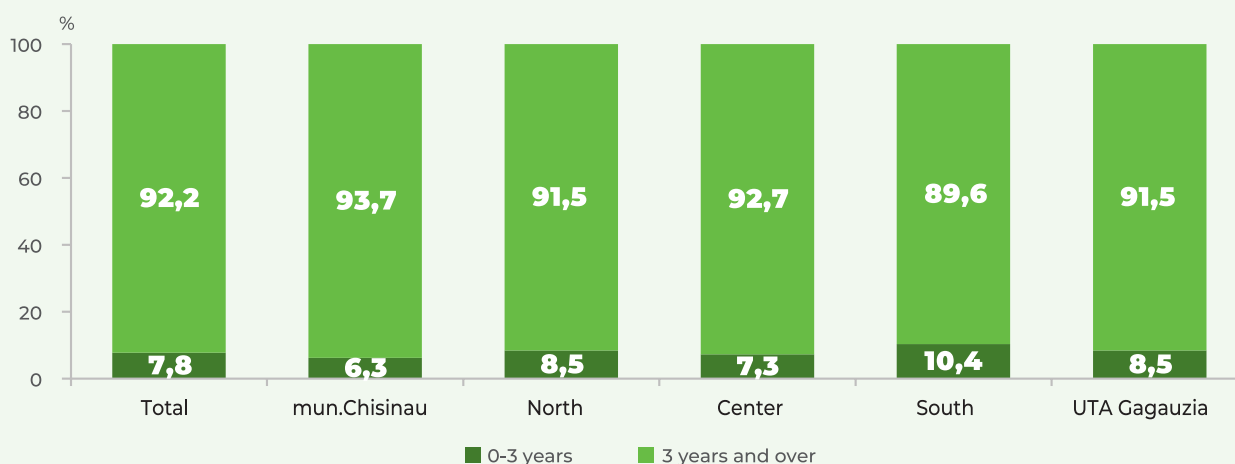


rate of access to early childhood education institutions for children up to 3 years old is only 7,8% in 2020²². In Chisinau, where the highest share of the workforce is registered, the enrollment rate of children in early education institutions (0-3 years) is 6.3% (see chart 4)²³. One explanation in this regard would be the insufficient supply of places for children in early education institutions (0-3 years).

²² National Bureau of Statistics <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

²³ National Bureau of Statistics <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

Chart 4. Proportion of children enrolled in early education institutions (0-3 years) and pre-school education institutions (3 years and over), by regions, in 2020^{24, 25}



Regarding the network of primary and general secondary education institutions, at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year, there were 1241²⁶ registered educational institutions. From the total number of children enrolled in primary and general secondary education institutions, 51,9% were from urban areas. The gross enrolment rate of children in primary education institutions in the academic year 2021/21 reached 97,8% compared to 97,3% in 2019/20²⁷.

It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of both public and private primary education institutions also offer afterschool services for children in their institutions, assisting children in preparing their homework.

²⁴ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

²⁵ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168>

²⁶ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168&id=6862>

²⁷ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&id=6962&idc=168&id=6862>

Afterschool programs are usually a paid service, but in the case of socially vulnerable families, the fees are covered by public funds. Afterschool services with a more diverse program, in most cases, can only be found in urban areas, especially in Chisinau, and are provided in most instances by private entities (non-governmental organizations or private enterprises). In such cases, the financing of these services is sourced from fees paid by the parents. The national data collection system does not gather information on this category of services and for this reason, the data on how many families request such services, the profile of these families, and the average amount spent annually is not known. What is certain, is that families with children aged 7-10, in which both parents are employed, need such services, and for them to be affordable as well. A simple analysis of the prices for private afterschool services, which vary from 75-100 Euro per month, shows that these services can be expensive for most families, especially when taking into account that the average gross nominal monthly salary was 8107,5 lei²⁸ (412 Euro, in 2020).

At the same time, afterschool services are also provided in community centers, which operate as accredited social service providers. In this case, the services are centered towards children from vulnerable families and are mostly financed by various international donors, through projects implemented by non-profit organizations. During the pandemic crisis, these services were also suspended.

The Covid 19 pandemic showed that the way in which early and primary education services are organized and operated is not suitable for crises. It took more than 7 months to launch discussions on adapting these services to the new conditions. Throughout this period the burden of caring for young children as well as assisting those aged 7 to 10 years old in the learning process was largely placed on the shoulders of women, who were forced to adjust their work schedules by reducing the workload or quitting their jobs.

²⁸ <https://statistica.gov.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=452>

Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes

The Moldovan society still shares strong gender stereotypes, and the perceptions of traditional gender roles are strongly rooted in the mentality of most individuals. According to the Gender Barometer conducted in 2016, only 20.5% of respondents indicate a lack of gender stereotypes. This estimate is based on the answers about the decision-making roles in the family, and the perception of the man's duty to provide financial means. Almost 58.3% of respondents agreed with at least one gender stereotype (whether they agree that it is the responsibility of men to provide the financial means for the family or that decisions must be made primarily by one gender), and 21.2% of respondents agreed with both stereotypes²⁹. From 2006 to 2016, the perceptions of traditional gender roles have not improved significantly. In 2016, 52% of people consider that is not appropriate when a man stays at home and takes care of children and 64%³⁰ of respondents agreed with the statement that the responsibility of a man is to bring money home and that of a woman is to take care of the family and household (only 3% less compared to 2006). The dimension where we can observe positive tendencies is the participation of women in politics and decision-making processes. 72% of those interviewed, mentioned that the sex of the person does not matter when it comes to public administration and politics, which is 11 percentage points more compared to 2006.

Rigid gender roles impact both men and women. The distribution of household responsibilities continues to be highly unequal, with many more women receiving the burden of working a job and at home as well. Even if some positive

changes concerning gender roles were recorded before the pandemic, the new circumstances imposed by the crisis increased the danger not only of losing these modest results but also of deepening gender stereotypes further.

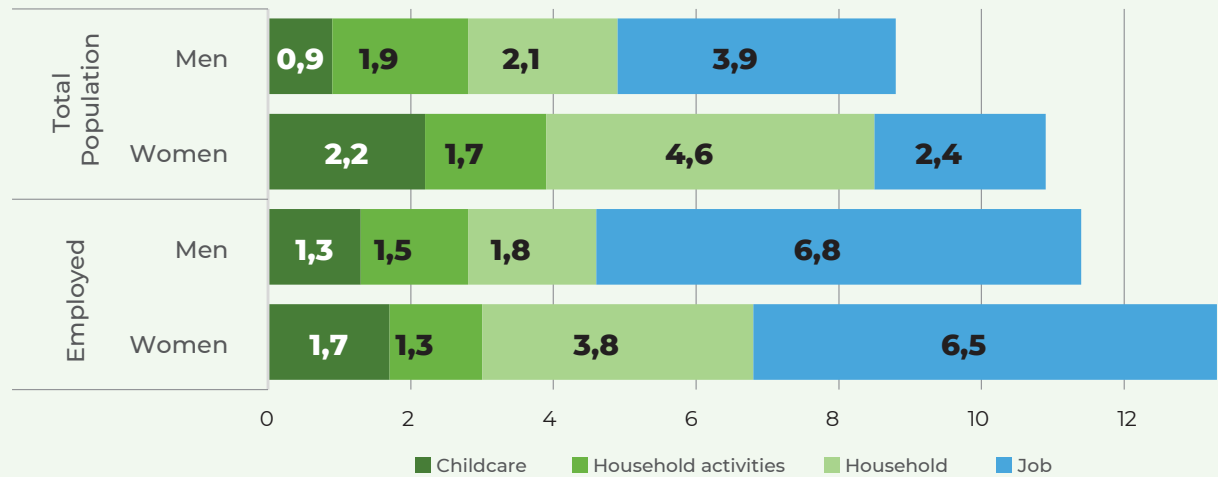
The global pandemic also faced by Moldovan women from March 2020 to the present day shows that poorly developed state policies and the social services system for the care of children and the elderly that is not adapted to the realities of the present day are worsening women's situation in all aspects. Research conducted in 2020 on the COVID-19 impact on gender roles in Moldova concluded that care responsibilities have isolated and will further isolate women during the pandemic crisis. Besides the overall crisis related to care responsibilities, household members face psychological challenges and mental health issues in connection with the need to obey the lockdown/state of emergency regime. Data of tracker-surveys regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Moldova highlight that men have been going out of their house more often and interacted with more people outside their family or household, while women spent more time in isolation at home³¹. The closure of educational institutions overloaded the parents, especially women. This measure revealed that the working days, especially of parents that are working remotely, are not compatible with taking care of children and

²⁹ CPD, UN Women, UNDP. Gender Barometer. 2017. https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20moldova/attachments/publications/2018/barometrul%20de%20gen_rom.pdf?la=ro&vs=5209

³⁰ CPD, UN Women, UNDP. Gender Barometer. 2017

³¹ UN Women, CPD, Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Studiu_Impact_COVID_corectat.pdf

Chart 5. Average number of hours per day used by women and men for main activities



Source : UN Women, CPD, Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles Childcare

adults in need of care. If we include also the supervision of children’s remote schoolwork, then the amount of home care work grows exponentially. More than 51.2% of women reported that the number of hours dedicated to schoolwork with children has increased and 54% of them mentioned that they are much more involved in cleaning, taking care of family members, cooking³², etc. On the other hand, 39% of men spend more time on simpler household management activities – paying invoices, providing the household with what is needed, taking care of pets/ domestic animals, etc.

Unfair division of tasks makes women dedicate twice as much time to family care. An analysis of the time, broken down into types of activities, reveals significant discrepancies between the time used for house chores and childcare. Household responsibilities account for the largest share of the day of a woman – 4.6 hours among the total population and 3.8 hours among employed women. Men generally use the

largest share of their time for work – 3.9 hours on average among the total population. At the same time, the duration of the day used for main activities is about 2 hours longer for women compared to men³³. The unfair division of care roles is mainly determined by the overall perceptions of gender roles in society. These views are shared among both men and women – with around 60% of respondents believing that family responsibilities are mostly the women’s obligation. Consequently, there are two main challenges: on one hand, there is the constraint and moral pressure exerted by society, and on the other hand, women are willingly accepting the traditionally ‘prescribed’ roles. Stereotypes are more present among the age group of 30-44 years: 76% of them believing that a man must support financially his family, while

³² UN Women, CPD, Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. 2021

³³ UN Women, CPD, Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. 2021

67% believe that women should spend most of their time taking care of the family and households³⁴. It is worth mentioning that the perceptions of care roles are much more emphasized compared to the ones related to participation (or non-participation) of women in decision-making and political processes. Most members of the Moldovan society believe that women are capable to get involved in politics, but at the same time, they consider that their involvement should not be at the expense of their families or others in their care.

Another problem that is highly connected with gender stereotypes is violence against women. In the pre-pandemic Moldova, according to findings from a national study, 63% of women experienced at least some form of violence (psychological, physical, or sexual) from a husband/partner during their lifetimes, and one in ten women mentioned experiencing economic violence at least once in their lifetimes. Moreover, 11% of women consider that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife in some circumstances. It should be mentioned that domestic violence during lockdown has also become a cause for concern for about half of the population. With the spreading of the COVID-19 virus and the enforcement of the lockdown, the risk of domestic violence went up and about half of women expressed their fears regarding this topic (46%)³⁵. A recent evaluation³⁶ showed that access to specialized services is made through the hotline telephone for Women and Girls financed from the public budget, which is available 24/7, connecting the callers directly to service providers and competent bodies. Specialized short and long-term services for victims of domestic violence that include placement services, legal assistance, psychological assistance,

social assistance, medical services, are still insufficient in Moldova³⁷ and a large extension of these services will be possible only by developing partnerships with non-profit organizations that already have a certain level of experience in this field, and by increasing the funding allocated from state and local budgets to cover all the needs of the beneficiaries. During the pandemic, it became clear that most services are not prepared for emergencies and crises (including health crises). Institutions providing such services were not equipped with rooms for isolating potentially infected people (although the minimum quality standards provide for this) and no additional financial resources have been allocated for the necessities related to the pandemic. Moreover, no response strategy has been developed for such situations either by central or local public authorities (especially given that the number of infected people is increasing, at the same time with the number of cases of violence).

³⁴ UN Women, CPD, Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. 2020

³⁵ UN Women, Women's Law Center. Mid-term Evaluation Report on the implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2018-2023, 2020

³⁶ The mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2018-2023

³⁷ UN Women, Women's Law Center. Mid-term Evaluation Report on the implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for 2018-2023 2020. <https://moldova.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/United%20Nations%20Moldova%20Covid-19%20Response%20and%20Recovery%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

2. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT SITUATION AND COVID-19 IMPACT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused several shocks for the general population and it was observed that the situation has different effects on men and women, both economically and socially. In the gender structure of people affected by the pandemic, women predominated in all quarters, with an average share in 2020 of 59.7% compared to 40.3% for men, while in total it occupies, in 2020, for women 47.9% and men, respectively, 52.1%. In the distribution by residence areas of this indicator had higher values in urban areas, on average 60.9%, compared to rural areas, 39.1% on average for 2020 (the total share of urban areas was 45.3% and the rural environment, respectively, of 54.7%)³⁸. In the third quarter of 2020, the employment rate was 5.1% lower than in the third quarter of 2019. The share of men was higher than that of women (52.6% men and 47.4% women)³⁹, and the share of people employed in rural areas was higher than that of people employed in urban areas (55.7% rural area and 44.3% urban area, respectively). The informal economy employs 17.6%⁴⁰ of the total employed population, the majority of which work in agriculture. The share of self-employed and informally employed people in Moldova is significant, which increases the risks of serious economic repercussions for these groups as they are proven to be among the most vulnerable groups during economic crises. In 2019, 10.1% of women were self-employed workers, 6.5% were unpaid family workers, and 0.2% of women were employers and members of cooperatives⁴¹. In the second quarter of 2020, every tenth person aged 15 and over, stated that the health crisis had a direct negative impact on them. Of the total number of people

whose employment has been affected by the pandemic, the absolute majority, over 92%, are employed, and 7% are people who have become unemployed due to the pandemic. The number of employed people who stated that their situation at work was affected by COVID-19 was 24.4% out of the total employed population (compared to 4.1% of the total employed population in the first quarter, 2020).

From the beginning of the emergency period (March 2020), women started to back down from the labor market. The first step of this mass exodus from the labor market was when many women started working remotely, with 33% (Q2 of 2020) of women working in such conditions compared to 14 percent of men. The share of women affected in the second quarter of 2020 has increased by almost 7%⁴², compared with the 1st quarter.

In the gender structure of the workforce, the share of women is 60.5% of the total number of people affected at work and that of men is 39.5% (see annex 4)⁴³. The share of women who have worked fewer hours per week is 16 percentage points higher than that of men (see chart 6). These discrepancies result in part from the decision to close kindergartens and schools, including other care services, where the majority of the workforce consists predominantly of women. None the less, women who worked remotely had to combine

³⁸ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?!=ro&idc=168&id=7006>

³⁹ National Bureau of Statistics, <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?!=ro&idc=168&id=7006>

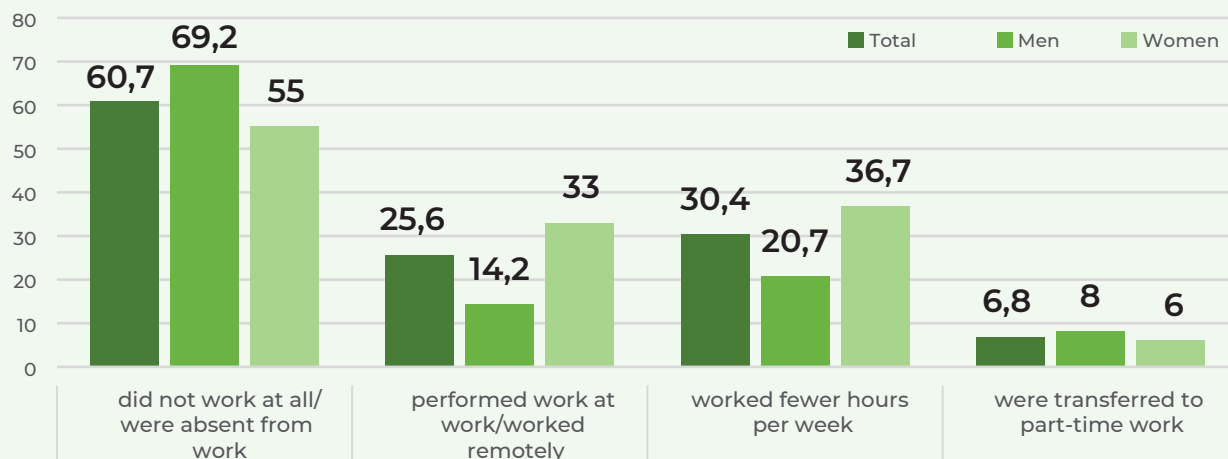
⁴⁰ National Bureau of Statistics

⁴¹ <https://www.genderpulse.md/ro/abilitare-economica/ocuparea-fortei-de-munca/rata-de-ocupare>

⁴² National Bureau of Statistics

⁴³ National Bureau of Statistics

Chart 6. Persons whose situation at work has been affected by COVID 19 pandemic. Quarter 2, 2020 (%)



additional childcare activities with their work tasks, or temporarily give up the latter. Thus, women have been affected by the current crisis to a greater extent than men and there is a risk that the impact on women's participation in the labor market will be long-lasting.

In addition to the data above, there are other factors that increased women's vulnerability during the pandemic. Among them, there is the 14.1% overall pay gap between men and women, that was recorded in the Moldovan economy before the pandemic struck (2019), a high share of NEET women (35.5% versus 19.4% NEET men), and the structure of the income sources for each gender. The NEET indicator shows that the percentage of women and men who are not in education, employment, or training is significant. In Chisinau, the region with the most opportunities for study and work, about a third of women aged 15-29 do not work⁴⁴, do not study, and do not receive any training. In the southern and northern regions of Moldova, the share of NEET among women is even higher - about 33%. (see annex 5). At the national level, in 2020,

40.3% of total registered NEET people were women aged between 15-29 years old⁴⁵. The available data regarding the income sources during the pandemic shows that men receive more income from economic activities, while women receive more income from social allowances and remittances. The disaggregated analysis of the data reveals that major discrepancies are found when we look from the gender perspective. It is noteworthy that women are twice as dependent on remittances compared to men. To be precise, remittances account for one-fifth of women's disposable income⁴⁶ and women from rural areas depend on remittances to a larger extent. Data reveals that as much as 30% of the income of women in rural areas consist of remittances, which makes them the most dependent category

⁴⁴ National Bureau of Statistics, <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6934>

⁴⁵ National Bureau of Statistics, <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=6934>

⁴⁶ UN Women. CPD. Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles. 2020. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20moldova/attachments/publications/2020/un%20woman%20en%20240820.pdf?la=en&vs=38>

on this income source. Women that reside in urban areas (15.6%) are twice as dependent compared to men residing in urban areas (6.5%) – the dependence of rural women is fivefold larger than that of men⁴⁷. It is worth mentioning that young women, as well as older women, mentioned a decrease in their incomes during the pandemic. As many as 66.8%⁴⁸ of young women (18-29 years old) mentioned that due to the economic restrictions imposed in the first half of 2020, they were affected in the form of a decrease, or suspension of, their salaries. Older women have reported a higher decrease in their income (cumulatively 42% citing at least some decrease in income, versus 18% of older men)⁴⁹.

The current crisis has affected women disproportionately due to the overlapping of several factors specific to the impact of COVID-19 on both the economy and public life. One such factor is the complete or partial closure of kindergartens and schools, with women taking on the main task of caring for their children. Under these circumstances, many women and young families with children of 0-7 years old have had to reduce their working hours or leave the labor market to cope with the increased burden of childcare⁵⁰. Another specific factor is the high share of women working in the service sector, especially healthcare, and this fact exposes them more to the infection with COVID-19. Both aspects are applicable in the case of the Republic of Moldova, where schools and kindergartens were closed, and where women accounted for as much as 81% of all employees in the 'health and social assistance' sectors in 2019.

The impact of the pandemic crisis on the business environment in Moldova has greatly aggravated the socio-economic wellbeing of women, including women

entrepreneurs. There are several particular financial and social factors that contributed to this situation. The main factor that impoverished women, including women entrepreneurs, was limited access to cheap funds to cover the business operations during the pandemic. Until the pandemic, 62% of male and female entrepreneurs reported very limited access to financing, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises that operated in the agricultural, retail, and hospitality sectors, where the workforce consists predominantly out of women. During the pandemic, this problem had a larger impact due to the nature of the business environment at this time, and many women entrepreneurs had to suspend their work.

⁴⁷ UN Women. CPD. Assessment of COVID-19 impact on gender roles.2020, <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20moldova/attachments/publications/2020/un%20woman%20en%20240820.pdf?la=en&vs=38>

⁴⁸ Public Opinion Barometer: <http://bop.ipp.md/ro>

⁴⁹ UNDP, UNFPA, Gov of the Republic of Moldova. Impact Assessment Report. Social and Economic Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups and economic sectors in the Republic of Moldova. November 2020, https://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/library/inclusive_growth/social-and-economic-impact-assessment-of-covid-19-in-the-republi.html

⁵⁰ World Bank. Gender Dimension of the COVID-19 Pandemic.2020: [http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/618731587147227244/pdf/Gender-Dimensions-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf groups and economic sectors in the Republic of Moldova. November 2020](http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/618731587147227244/pdf/Gender-Dimensions-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf%20groups%20and%20economic%20sectors%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova%20November%202020)

Childcare and Women's Employment

Women's participation in the labor market in Moldova is largely determined by both how strong are gender stereotypes rooted in the fabric of the society and the existence of children in the family. Persistent patriarchal attitudes and the insufficient development of care services limit their employment options, a fact confirmed by the employment rate, in 2019 for women aged between 25-49 years with children aged between 0-6 year, that was 39.4%, or 23.1% less than the employment rate of men with children of the same age group. In contrast, the employment rate of women without children (25-49 years) was 62.9% with 6.4% higher than the employment rate of men without children (see annex1). Compared to 2019, women's employment rate in 2020 was lower than that of men. In the second quarter of 2020, the number of employed women decreased by 10% and in the 3rd quarter - by 8,2% compared to the same quarters of 2019, while the number

of employed men decreased by 3,6% in the first quarter of 2020 and by 7,6% in the second quarter.⁵¹

As the Moldovan society is still characterized by strong gender stereotypes, this is also reflected in the statistics on women's economic activity. The analysis by age categories of women and men inactive in the labor market shows a rather pronounced gap that is most probably a consequence of the domestic responsibilities that women usually have. Although the number of unpaid working hours increases for both men and women when they have children, the share of domestic and care activities carried out by each gender is far from equal in most cases. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 97% of women that are inactive in the labor market, state that this is because of the family responsibilities

⁵¹ <https://statistica.gov.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=7006>

Chart 7.
Family responsibilities %

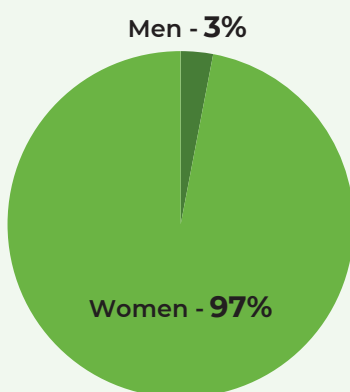
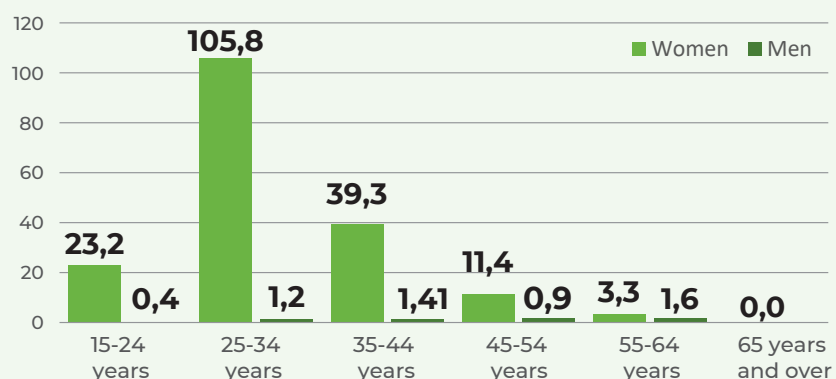


Chart 8.
Family responsibilities (thousands of people)



Source: NBS, 2018

that they have (chart 7). Only 3% of inactive men in the labor market mention their responsibilities in the family as the main cause of their inactivity.

At the same time, the analysis by age categories (chart 8) reveals that the gender gap is quite significant for women aged between 15 to 44 years, a period characterized by the existence of children of preschool or school-age in the family. This can be explained both by the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in society, but also by the lack of opportunities in childcare that would facilitate the more active involvement of mothers in the labor market. The low provision and diversity of childcare services are influencing as well women's entrepreneurial activity. Studies conducted before the pandemic show that the lack or insufficiency of childcare services and the excessively high burden of family activities were among the most important impediments that limited women's entrepreneurship⁵². In 2017, the share of entrepreneurs with children under the age of 7 was 23.2%. Among women entrepreneurs, it was 18%, while among men entrepreneurs 25.9%, or 7.9 p.p. higher. In the families of male entrepreneurs, the presence of children is higher than in the families of female entrepreneurs, while the gender differences in the families of entrepreneurs are attested among companies of all sizes. However, the largest gender gaps are observed among companies with more than 250 employees. The presence of children under the age of 7 in the families of male entrepreneurs is the highest (32%). The situation is the opposite for women. Among businesswomen who run or own companies with more than 250 employees, the presence of children of that age is the lowest (14.8%).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, entrepreneurs with children of up to 7 years prefer the services of early education institutions. On average, about 51.7% of entrepreneurs use this service in their children's upbringing. However, the share of women entrepreneurs who use the services of specialized institutions slightly exceeds the share of male entrepreneurs (1.4%). In the absence of early education services, grandparents are usually the alternative childcare solution for many entrepreneurs. About 32.3% of entrepreneurs used the help of grandparents (33.5% of male entrepreneurs and 29.1% of female entrepreneurs), before the pandemic. At the same time, a small share of entrepreneurs (3.6%) turned to other relatives to take care of their children. The childcare services provided by nannies are used by about 4.7% of entrepreneurs, and 4.6% of them leave their children of up to 7 years old alone⁵³. Business women more often than men contact childcare services provided by nannies or leave children alone without supervision during working hours. The proportion of female entrepreneurs who resorted to the services of a nanny before the pandemic was 6.5% compared to 4% - the share of male entrepreneurs using the same service. The share of women entrepreneurs who left children alone at home is 2 times higher compared to that of men (7.2% - women; 3.4% - men). Male entrepreneurs, most likely, have the support of their life partner in raising and caring for children

⁵² Analytical report on women and men participation in entrepreneurship. Chisinau, 2020, p.28: https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Antreprenoriat_feminin/Antreprenoriat_Femei_Barbati_2020.pdf

⁵³ National Bureau of Statistics. Analytical Report on the women and men in entrepreneurship. Chisinau, 2020, p.42-43: https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Antreprenoriat_feminin/Antreprenoriat_Femei_Barbati_2020.pdf

which explains the gender discrepancy. Women entrepreneurs, without this support, are often left in a situation where they have to leave their children alone without supervision during working hours.

These findings confirm the problem of underdevelopment of early childhood care services, as well as the imbalances between work and family life, and the uneven distribution of domestic responsibilities between women and men. These issues limit women's activity in the labor market. Therefore, the development of childcare services, at the same time as a more equitable distribution of family responsibilities between women and men would contribute greatly to the increase of the participation rate of women in the social, economic, and political life of the country.

The issues discussed above were not sufficiently addressed by public policies until the pandemic, and during the pandemic, they have worsened even more, as between March 17 and September 1, 2020, when by the decision of the National Commission for Extraordinary Public Health, all early education services in both rural and urban areas were suspended. Even if the authorities have approved a package of incentives and additional funds, the support was quite small compared to the real needs of the population and was lacking a more targeted approach towards vulnerable groups of the population. The interventions of the Moldovan Government have not provided real solutions for the childcare problem faced by tens of thousands of families with children aged 0-7 years that had no care alternative. The situation was worse for single-parent families and personnel employed in the first line against the COVID-19 pandemic, such as doctors, nurses, police officers, social

workers, and other essential workers. Most essential workers with children were put in the situation to look for individual childcare solutions, which increased the emotional stress of both the children and parents. The issue was much more effectively addressed in other countries, for example in Poland, where if the nursery, children's club, kindergarten, or school a child attends was closed due to COVID-19, parents were entitled to 14 additional days of childcare allowance. Likewise, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Italy provided parents with extra cash when childcare services and schools were closed. Unlike the above examples, the solutions offered by the Government of Moldova were not suitable for either parents or children during the pandemic.

In this regard, one of the Government's priorities should be to develop intervention strategies, to reduce the impoverishment level of women/families (consequently of children), and to decrease the risks that threaten the health and life of children that are left alone by working parents. Delaying the process of identifying appropriate solutions for childcare, both in times of normal activity and in situations of crisis, creates new premises for deepening gender discrimination and increasing the financial vulnerability of families with children, especially women. This is confirmed by the data of the UNICEF study conducted in 2018⁵⁴, where it is mentioned that traditionally in Moldova, the biological mother remains the main caregiver in most cases for children aged from 0-6 years old (81, 9%).

⁵⁴ UNICEF. Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care. 2018

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY MEASURES

The assistance offered by the Government during the pandemic was established by law no. 56 of April 2nd, 2020, and the main actions were focused on two dimensions: 1) social support; 2) support⁵⁵ to the economy and business environment. The main actions focused on social support have 3 areas of intervention: support for the health sector, support for strengthening the labor and social protection, and support for the education sector. Activities undertaken to strengthen the support for the **health** sector included: the establishment of an online platform on the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic; organizing a hotline to inform the population about the pandemic; inclusion of public health emergencies in the volume of medical services provided under the mandatory healthcare insurance; designation of 53 public health institutions for hospitalization of patients diagnosed with COVID-19; creation of the public health institution “COVID-19 Center Chisinau”; purchase of the necessary equipment for the treatment of patients infected with COVID19, etc. Later, the Constitutional Court, through Decision no.39 of 2020 declared the law unconstitutional due to not respecting of legal procedure while approving it.

For increasing the **labor and social protection of the population**, the measures undertaken included: the increase of the unemployment fund and matching the unemployment benefits with the value of the guaranteed minimum wage in the real sector of the economy (2 775 Moldovan lei (141 Euro)); granting the right to Moldovan

migrants who return to the country to receive unemployment support and social protection; adjusting the legal regulation for organizing remote work; introducing the scholarships for students and interns, undergoing internship programs during 2020 in health institutions with a COVID-19 profile; establishing the compensation for the descendants of the medical staff that have lost their lives as a result of their activity carried out in the fight against COVID-19; introducing the electronic system for receiving applications for review of the pension payments, through the single government portal of public services, etc.

In the field of **education**, the broadcasting of video lessons prepared under the “Online Education project” was launched in partnership with the national television and 13 other television channels which are now available to teachers, students, and parents throughout the country. Over 300 teachers from 69 educational institutions contributed to the preparation of the content of these video lessons. Psychological assistance for students, parents, and teachers was provided and an additional 20 million MDL was allocated for purchasing the necessary equipment to guarantee the high-quality level of the educational process. The MECR organized training for teachers on how to use digital resources and has modified the educational procedures for the completion

⁵⁵ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=121129&lang=ro

of the lower and upper secondary educational cycles by canceling the final exams and grading the students based on their overall academic performance. The instructions for the early education institutions' activity during the pandemic were developed and institutions started reopening from September 1st, 2020⁵⁶. The decision to open the kindergartens was not approved at the national level but was left at the discretion of the local authorities, who had the task to assess the epidemiological situation in the administered territory and decide when to reopen preschool education services, to train kindergarten staff on how to operate in the new conditions, and to ensure that there are testing protocols as necessary. Central authorities in the field of education and health, in turn, provided special guidance to local public authorities, founders, institution managers, educators, and parents on key rules for ensuring a healthy educational environment for children during the pandemic.

According to the established requirements, all local authorities who intended to open kindergartens had the obligation to train educators on how to implement the adapted curriculum, how to communicate clearly with parents, how to maintain child-friendly practices that are appropriate for child development, as well as how explanations should be given to children on why certain toys can no longer be used, why windows are frequently opened, and what games can be played safely only outdoors. An important aspect of the training was instructing educators on methods used for helping children understand that they have some control over their environment.

In each district, special commissions were set up, which together with the local authorities' representatives evaluated

the situation of each kindergarten and developed based on the evaluation appropriate decisions on the reopening of kindergartens. The vast majority of early education institutions have been reopened since September 1st, and so far, each of them operates under a specific program, dictated by the incidence of COVID-19 cases in the locality where the educational institution operates. There have been cases of closure of specific groups, or even institutions when several risks were identified. It is worth mentioning that, in the vast majority of cases, teachers employed in early education institutions received their salaries even during the period when all kindergartens were closed.

For supporting the **economy and business environment**, the Moldova Government allocated budgetary financial resources, for economic support measures; reduced the VAT by 5% for the HORECA sector; subsidized enterprises and non-profit organizations, that could not cover the costs of staff and/or ceased their activity during the state of emergency, including subsidizing the banking sector to lower the interest rates on contracted loans; increased the access of farmers for reductions in the mandatory social insurance contributions, through which the state subsidizes 6% out of 18%; extended the deadlines for paying tax and for filing tax reports for companies that suspended their activity under the decisions of the CES, as well as extending the deadlines for paying local taxes and filing related reports; established a moratorium on state controls, including tax and post-clearance customs audits; simplified customs formalities to fluidize

⁵⁶ Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR): https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/reglementari-cad-ru_redeschidere_gradinite_final_07.08.2020_1.pdf

the traffic of exported/re-exported goods through international post dispatches by economic operators, including residents of the free economic zones etc. (see annex 2); Even if the list of undertaken activities is long, these measures are of a general nature which reduces their overall impact. They are considerably fewer than those taken by EU member states and can be described as quite modest compared to the extent of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the economy and people in the Republic of Moldova. Also, the actions in question are not aimed at supporting particularly vulnerable population groups. Analyzing from a gender perspective all undertaken measures at the national level, the COVID-19 *Global Gender Response Tracker* places the Republic of Moldova among the group of 11 countries⁵⁷ out of all countries analyzed, with the lowest number of actions aimed at supporting women during the pandemic. Moldova implemented during the evaluation period only 3 gender-sensitive actions that were focused on issues of violence against women, and 1 action was implemented in the area of women's economic security and unpaid care. Comparing the differences between the actions taken by the Republic of Moldova and other countries, it is fair to mention that out of 48 countries analyzed, the leaders are Spain, Australia, Greece Portugal, and the UK⁵⁸, which implemented 13-16 national measures during the pandemic that have a gender-sensitive character.

Given these shortcomings in the policies to combat the effects of COVID-19, it is recommended to implement measures focused on supporting existing commercial entities and facilitating job creation, supporting women and young people during the pandemic, offering financial support to self-employed individuals, etc.

In the next period, the Government aims to promote targeted public policies that will lay the foundations of a new economic structure that will be more advanced on the technological chain, more resistant to internal and external shocks, more sustainable in terms of environmental conservation, and more efficient in terms of public spending. The Government will implement policies on the following priorities: 1) Reduce regulatory constraints to support the private sector affected by the pandemic; 2) Provide facilities and reduce administrative constraints in the tax field; 3) Provide state aid for the development of the private sector affected by the pandemic; 4) Ensure the population's access to basic services in the field of health, social protection and education. The Economic Council to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova developed the draft COVID-19 Matrix, which includes the first 3 priorities mentioned above. According to them, the cost of intervention for the 3 priority areas would be 3.7 billion lei. To this cost we should add the cost of priority nr. 4 "Ensure population access to basic services in the field of health, social protection and education", to get the general picture of what resources are urgently needed to redress the pandemic situation⁵⁹. The Economic Council mentions that the investment of 3.7 billion lei in the 3 economic priorities would have an approximative impact of 12.9 billion lei, including increased revenues to the

⁵⁷ UNDP, UN Women. COVID-19 Global Gender response Tracker. Factsheet: Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand

⁵⁸ UNDP, UN Women. COVID-19 Global Gender response Tracker. Factsheet: Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand

⁵⁹ The Economic Council COVID 19 Matrix: <https://consecon.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Studiul-de-impact-al-pandemiei-COVID-19-asupra-sectoarelor-economice-%C8%99i-Matricea-de-politici-1.pdf>

national public budget of around 4.8 billion lei⁶⁰. Thus, the identified solutions bring net benefits to the national public budget worth around one billion lei.

The United Nations supports the Moldovan Government's efforts to combat the effects of the pandemic and has developed in partnership with the Government a Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan, which backs the National Covid-19 response Plan and the Government Action Plan for 2020-2023, providing the plan for 44 valuable interventions. The cost of this Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan is \$

70.2M, allocated on 5 pillars: Health (\$16.4M), Protecting People (\$ 8.9M), Economic Response (\$ 29.2M), Macroeconomic Response (\$4.4 M), and Social Cohesion (\$ 11.5M)⁶¹. The plan is supported at this stage by 37 partners.

⁶⁰ COVID-19 Matrix. Report prepared by the Economic Council to the Prime Minister.2020. <https://consecon.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/COVID-19-Pandemic-Impact-Study-on-Economic-Sectors-and-Policy-Matrix.pdf>

⁶¹ UN COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan, September 2020. https://moldova.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Moldova%20Covid-19_FINAL_0.pdf

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Moldova is a country with an established national network of preschool education services for children aged 2-7. However, it is necessary to continue to expand this network in order to offer access for all parents, so that the birth and upbringing of children does not constitute an obstacle in the professional career of both women and men. Currently, there are waiting lists for enrolling children in public kindergartens in many urban areas and there is a severe lack of nursery services, especially in Chisinau, where the largest proportion of the workforce resides. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the inadequacy of childcare services and increased the socio-economic vulnerabilities of Moldovan women, especially those with children up to 10 years of age.

It should be noted that childcare services designed for children of up to two years are underdeveloped and require new approaches from the state. New approaches should involve the development of public-private partnerships and changing the financing mechanism. Moldova will have slow growth in the coverage in both rural and urban areas, as long as the state does not encourage the private sector to invest in the development of such services. Creating income streams in the local public authorities' budgets is a quintessential element in achieving progress, and contracting childcare services from non-profit organizations would be another viable alternative for increasing the coverage of these services without developing the administrative capacities required for the management of childcare services by the authorities.

Moldova needs to apply the principle of gender mainstreaming in the implemented public policies, thus reducing the various challenges that women face in this country. Bold actions are needed to eliminate discrimination in the labor market, to promote the balance between work and personal life, to reduce the rate of involvement of women in unpaid work, and to offer the same professional development opportunities for both men and women in all fields of activity. At the same time, sufficient resources must be allocated to increase women's access to education and professional counseling, support services for victims of violence and trafficking, and access to cheap financial resources for business development. The state's actions should also focus on protecting the incomes of employed women (and not only) in the sectors most affected by the pandemic, where the labor force is at risk of losing their employment status.

The actions of reducing the impact of COVID-19 on women and families with children need to be more effective and require approaches that focus on developing alternative solutions during and after the pandemic. This can be achieved only by involving the stakeholders in the development of these solutions to better understand their necessities, thus designing policies that will address their needs in the most efficient way.

The Parliament should

- **Monitor constantly the implementation of public policies** and keep the government responsible for implementing gender-sensitive policies and the country's international commitments on ensuring gender equality in the Republic of Moldova.
- **Amend the national legislation and create a solid basis for the:** elimination of all forms of discrimination, including the discrimination on the labor market; development of the mechanisms that ensure the balance between professional activity and personal life; reduction of the involvement rate of women in unpaid work, etc.
- **Ensure the COVID-19 emergency legislation and budgets** are developed based on sex-disaggregated data, gender impact assessments, and are consulted with gender experts.
- **Promote and encourage the use of temporary special measures** such as gender quotas and commitments to gender balance to ensure the equal representation of women (and/or women's organizations) in decision making on COVID-19 response and for the post COVID recovery.
- **Adopt gender sensitive national budgets** and ask for the Local Public Authorities to apply this principle at local level, when budgeting funds for local policies.
- **Adjust the national legislation** to facilitate private sector investment in the development of childcare services for children aged 0-7.

The Government should

- **Adjust its decision-making** mechanisms in order to allow rapid interventions and reallocation of funds to cover the real needs of the population, especially vulnerable groups including families with children, during the pandemic.
- **Strengthen its data collection capacity for all indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals** and use this data effectively in setting new policy interventions. It is worth mentioning that in Moldova, a lot of data is collected, but in many cases, it is not reliable or provided on time for it to be used in the decision-making process.
- **Require ministries and state agencies to use gender analysis when developing public policy** in all areas and to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination.

- **Invite women's organizations, economists, academics, trade unions**, to get involved in the development of the comprehensive response on decreasing the pandemic impact on women.
- **Work with women's groups and civil society organizations to provide targeted assistance to vulnerable groups**, including social, economic, legal and psychological support, and build this collaboration into national pandemic plan.
- **Increase the budget allocated for childcare institutions functioning during the pandemic** and ensure that they are safely reopened. The staff of these entities should have access to the necessary equipment that will allow them to work safely with, without endangering their health and the safety of children and their parents.
- **Develop childcare services adapted to offer services also in times of crisis**, and primarily for essential workers employed in the front line during the fight against the pandemic.
- **Launch mechanisms to encourage the business environment to invest in the childcare system development**, thus creating premises for increasing the employment rate of young women and men with children.
- **Develop and implement national mechanisms that eliminate all forms of discrimination against women**, including discrimination in the labor market.
- **Increase population access to various types of services, which would allow women to balance work and personal life**, thus removing the burden of unpaid work arising from the need to care for the children and the elderly in their families.
- **Develop state programs that provide access to affordable financial resources** to women entrepreneurs that were affected by the pandemic.

The CSOs should

- **Oversight of government responses to the pandemic and investigate** whether the impact of the government responses is the same for women as it is men. Revealing any discrepancies of taken actions.
- **Strengthen their capacities to collect data on the specific needs of vulnerable groups during crises**, and call for specific state interventions where problems are identified.
- **Ensure that the challenges that women face are addressed directly** through state policies and actions.
- **Adjust their services so they can be provided even in pandemic conditions and at times when public services cannot meet all demands;** to develop information campaigns which would help to reduce the risks to the health and well-being of the population.
- **Monitor that the Government's actions, taken after the crisis for enabling the socio-economic recovery,** also addresses the dimensions that generate social, economic, or other types of vulnerabilities for women.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1

Employment rate of people aged 25-49 by number of children (0-6 years), area of residence and sex

	2019		
	Both	Men	Women
Total			
Total with children	55,8	58,8	52,9
At least one child	50,0	62,5	39,4
No children	59,7	56,5	62,9
Urban			
Total with children	64,3	71,4	58,2
At least one child	56,8	76,2	41,0
No children	69,9	68,0	71,7
Rural			
Total with children	49,0	49,6	48,5
At least one child	44,1	51,0	38,0
No children	52,2	48,8	55,9

Source: National Bureau of Statistics:
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Annex 2

Implemented Economic and Financial Policies

Policy Category	Policy Type	Policy Description
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Credit Guarantee Fund for SMEs. At the moment, 201 financial guarantees are managed through this fund, totaling 104,8 million lei. The financial guarantees have facilitated 303,9 million lei in loans for SMEs and generated an additional 387,8 million lei in investments. The fund has been supplemented with 50 million by amending the law on the state budget for 2020.
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Extending the application deadline for the tax guarantee offered to the residents of the IT park and extending the reimbursement deadlines for payments made to tourism agencies.
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Reducing the VAT tax from 20% to 15% for the hospitality industry.
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Increasing the access of farmers for reductions in the mandatory social insurance contributions, through which the state subsidizes 6% out of 18%, these benefits being applicable to agricultural producers whose incomes derive from agricultural activities in the proportion of 95%;
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Covering the payroll taxes in full amount for all salaries and allowances paid by companies whose activity was suspended or partially suspended by the CES decisions.
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs/ self-employed	Establishing the single unemployment benefit for the holders of the entrepreneurial patents, as well as for individuals who carry out economic activities included under chapters 102 and 103, Title II, of the Fiscal Code no. 1163/1997, in the amount of 2775 lei (around 140.0 EUR).

Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Extending the deadlines for paying tax and for filing tax reports for companies that suspended their activity under the decisions of the CES, as well as extending the deadlines for paying local taxes and filing related reports;
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Establishing a moratorium on state controls, including tax and post-clearance customs audits;
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Providing opportunities for banks and non-bank credit organizations to defer the payments on loans taken by individuals and legal entities;
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Establishing the program for VAT reimbursements, where the contributors can apply for reimbursements in advance, thus increasing the liquidity of many commercial entities.
Economic measures	Support for entrepreneurs	Granting the right to deduct the tax on any donation made during 2020 for combatting COVID -19 through the bank accounts opened by the Ministry of Finance for this purpose or public medical and sanitary institutions;
Administration of public finances	COVID-19 emergency response	Changes to the state budget for including funding for: i) measures to support the health sector - in the amount of around 1040.4 million lei (EUR 52.0 million); ii) measures to support the population - in the amount of about 450.9 million lei (EUR 22.5 million); iii) measures to support the economy - in the amount of about 1034 million lei (EUR 51.7 million); iv) replenishment of Government emergency funds - by 488 million lei (EUR 24.4 million); v) increase of transfers to the state social insurance budget - by 682.3 million lei (EUR 34.1 million) and to local budgets - by 192.1 million lei (EUR 9.6 million) to partially cover the revenue loses incurred;
Administration of public finances	COVID-19 emergency response	Ensuring additional finance through the external loan from the IMF (granted through the RCF and RFI mechanisms) amounting to 233,9 million USD.

Administration of public finances	COVID-19 emergency response	Financing agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the International Development Association (IDA) for the implementation of the emergency response project to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total value of 52.9 million EUR. These resources aim to strengthen the technical capacities of medical institutions and support social assistance efforts mitigating the effects of the quarantine measures on individuals with low incomes.
Administration of public finances	COVID-19 emergency response	The loan agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the Council of Europe Development Bank for the implementation of the project “Emergency Response to COVID-19 and Support for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises”, amounting up to 70 million EUR. The project aims to direct the necessary financial resources to provide immediate support to the health sector in the fight against the outbreak of COVID-19, with a focus on strengthening its technical capacity, as well as supporting SMEs affected by the crisis.
Administration of public finances	COVID-19 emergency response	Financing agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the European Commission on the implementation of the project “EU4Moldova: Support the response of the health sector to the COVID pandemic and the implementation of the reforms stipulated under the Association Agreement”.

Source: Report on the implementation of the Government's Activity Program for the 10 months of 2020
<https://msmps.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/raport-guvern.pdf>

Annex 3

Implemented Policies in the areas of Health, Social Protection, Labor Relations and Family

Policy Category	Policy Type	Policy Description
Health	Budget rectification and supplementation	Additional funding for the health sector totaling around 1040.4 million lei (around 52.0 million EUR).
Health	Additional measures to facilitate medical services	Extension of the Single Compulsory Health Care Program by supplementing it with: 70 investigations in primary health care; 340 positions for outpatient care; 166 new high-performance services; medical services for the elderly and covering transport costs for patients that are undergoing chemotherapy.
Health and social protection	Additional measures to facilitate medical services	<p>Revision of the Catalogue of single tariffs for medical services provided (paid services) by public medical institutions, resulting in the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduction in tariffs for hemodialysis (from 2395 lei - to 1995 lei), hemodiafiltration (from 2645 lei - to 2195 lei) and cytopathological investigation (from 125 lei - to 62 lei); - inclusion of tariffs for new medical services, such as qualitative diagnosis of the SARS-CoV-2 virus RNA by Real-Time PCR method and diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 IgM antibodies, by Elisa method;
Health and social protection	Wage policies	Increasing by 10%, the salaries of the medical staff from the public medical-sanitary institutions included in the compulsory health insurance system.
Health and social protection	Wage policies	Increasing from September 1, 2020, the salaries of the medical staff (management staff, doctors, nurses, etc.) by 30%, including the salaries of ambulance drivers from the pre-hospital emergency medical service and those from the AVIASAN service.

Health and social protection	Cash transfers (conditional and unconditional)	Granting financial support for the medical staff that is infected with COVID-19 as a result of their work. The support is offered through a single payment of 16.000 lei (around 800 EUR).
Health and social protection	Cash transfers (conditional and unconditional)	Offering scholarships for students and residents who are doing internships (in 2020) in medical institutions designated for treating the COVID-19 virus.
Health and social protection	Measures to ensure the health of the population	Ensuring the right to rehabilitation/recovery / balneal treatment for people suffering from pneumofibrosis as a result of the COVID-19 virus.
Social protection	Wage policies	Financial motivation granted to the personnel involved in the surveillance, control, and treatment of the COVID-19 infection (National Agency for Public Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defence, National Administration of Penitentiaries, National Social Assistance Agency), during the state of emergency by granting a monthly compensation increase for work performed in high-risk conditions.
Social protection	Cash transfers (conditional and unconditional)	Allowances for the descendants of the deceased medical staff employed in the first line against COVID-19 (50% -70% of the average monthly income of the deceased person for the last 12 months);
Social Protection and family	Budget rectification and supplementation	Increasing the revenues and expenditure of the Population Support Fund by 71000,0 lei (around 3.6 million EUR) for the funding of the social service „Personal Assistance”.
Social Protection, family and childcare	Social benefits	Supporting disadvantaged families through the Social Assistance Program, by increasing the minimum guaranteed monthly income from 1107 lei to 1300 lei (193 lei / 10.0 EUR) – starting from April 1, 2020.
Social Protection, family and childcare	Social assistance	Increasing the social support for each child from 50% of the minimum guaranteed montly wage to 75%. The increase was of 277 lei per child (around 14.0 EUR).

Social Protection, family and childcare	Single payment allowances	Increasing the single childbirth allowance by 388 (19.4 EUR) lei, from 7911 (395.55 EUR) to 8299 lei (414.95 EUR) – starting with 01 January 2020
Social Protection	Pensions	Increasing the average pension by around 6%, from 1895 lei (94.8 EUR) to 2014 lei (100.7 EUR).
Social Protection	Social support	Increasing the average social support from 882 lei (44.1 EUR) to 1039 lei (52.0 EUR).
Social Protection	Social support	Increasing the financial support for the cold season from 350 lei (17.5 EUR) to 500 lei (25.0 EUR) for the first 6 months of 2020.

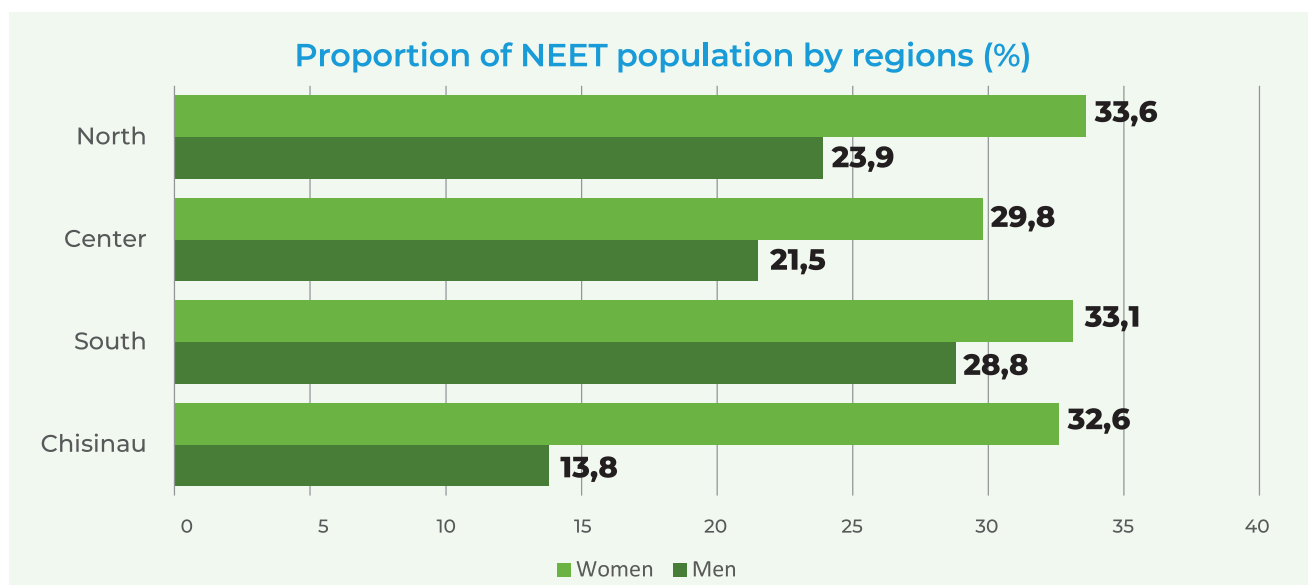
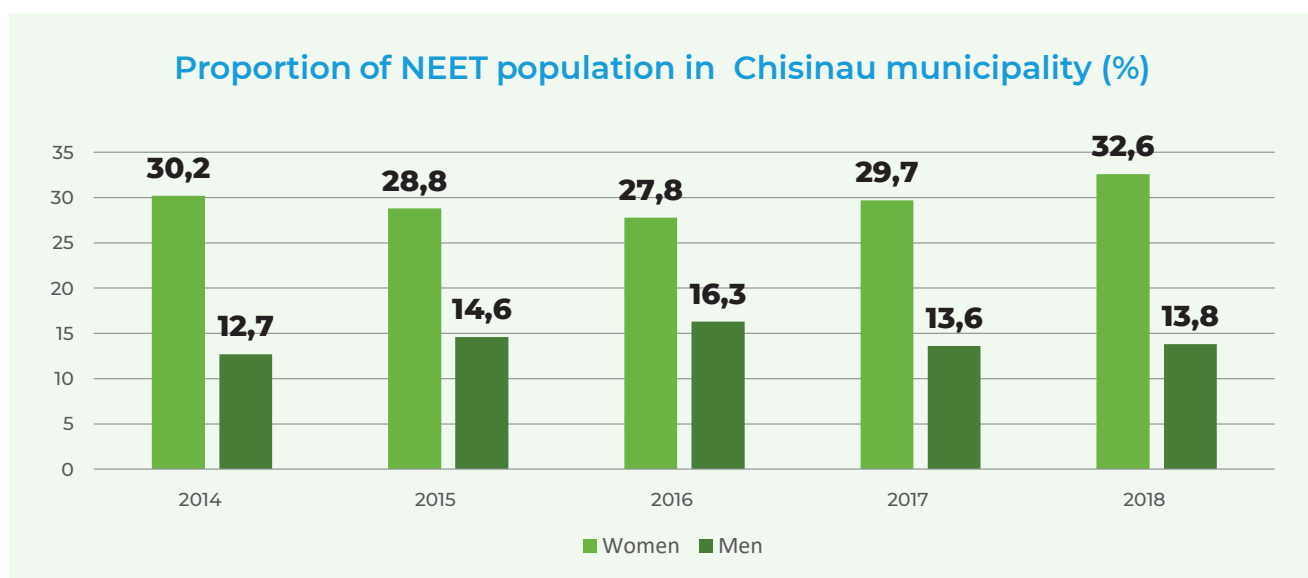
Source: Report on the implementation of the Government's Activity Program for the 10 months of 2020
<https://msmps.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/raport-guvern.pdf>

Annex 4

Number of employed persons affected at work by COVID-19 pandemic. Second Quarter 2020. (thousands of people)

	Total	Age groups					
		15-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65 years and more
Total	200,6	10,7	48,4	55,1	46,8	33,0	6,7
Men	79,2	6,8	19,7	20,8	15,2	13,4	3,3
Women	121,4	3,9	28,6	34,3	31,5	19,6	3,4
Urban	120,3	8,8	28,7	31,3	28,5	17,8	5,2
Rural	80,3	0,0	19,6	23,8	18,3	15,2	0,0

Annex 5




Source: National Bureau of Statistics

Palais des Nations
8-14 avenue de la Paix
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

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220 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: 212-906-6400
Fax: 212-906-6705

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