

Gender-Responsive Family Policies: Retaining Talent and Fostering Growth



**Expanding
Choices** through
Family-Friendly Policies



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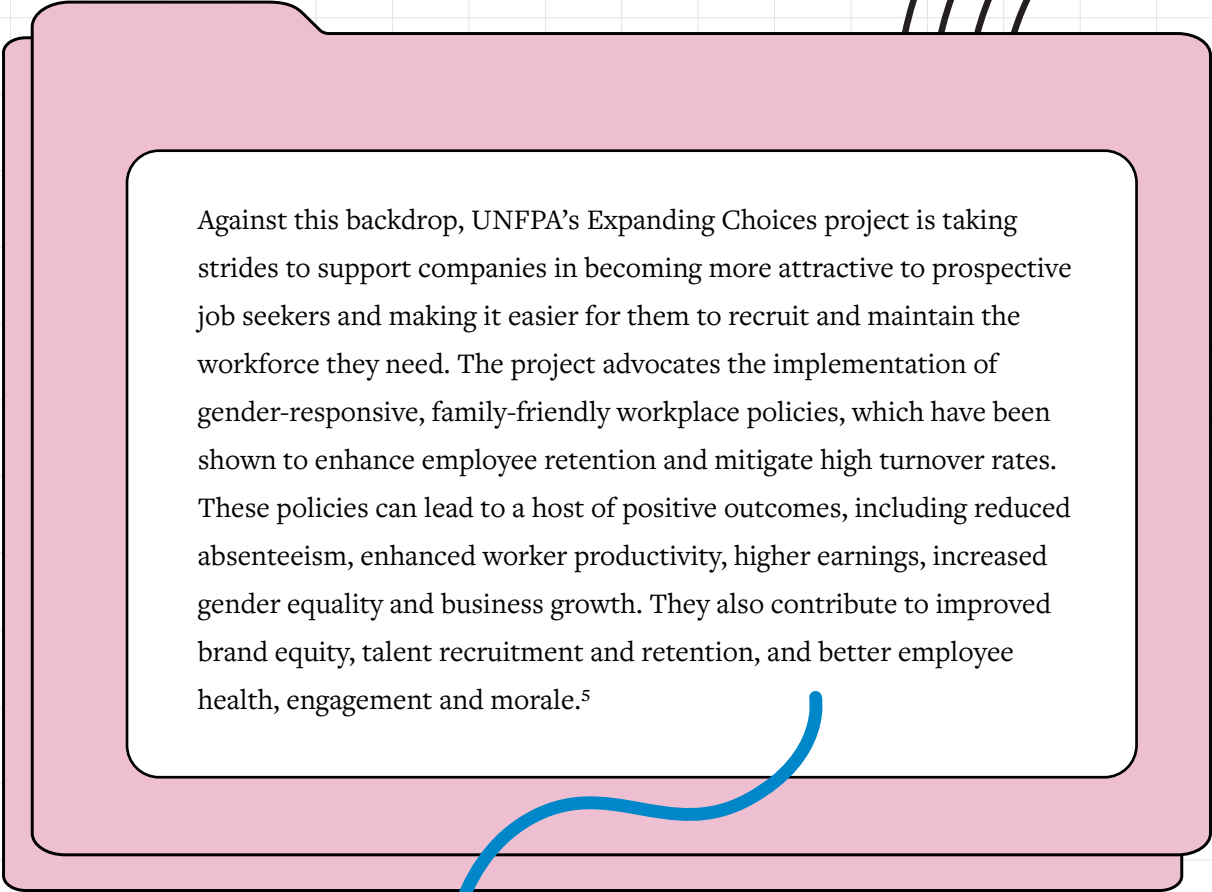
Companies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have long grappled with challenges relating to talent attraction and retention, made worse by a shrinking labour force. This is due not only to the emigration of skilled professionals seeking better opportunities elsewhere (the emigrant stock as a percentage of the total population stands at 14.6 per cent for Eastern Europe and 10.9 per cent for Central Asia¹) but also due to the underutilization of women. Women’s labour force participation and employment rates remain low (52 per cent in Albania, 54 per cent in the Republic of Moldova and 16.5 per cent in Kosovo*).² The burden of unpaid care work remains one of the biggest barriers preventing women from entering and remaining in the labour force: 32 per cent of women (15–29 years of age) in Albania and 29.6 per cent of women (15–24 years of age) in Kosovo are neither employed nor at school due to unpaid care work responsibilities.³ In the Republic of Moldova, which has one of the highest shares of women who are neither employed nor at school, 13 per cent of the total inactive population are homemakers, often forced into this position due to a lack of childcare services and preschool services especially in rural areas; women account for 96 per cent of this population.⁴

Mitigating the effects of a shrinking labour force and unlocking the potential for growth necessitates policies that bolster women’s participation in the workforce, attract and retain labour, and invest in human capital. For companies, this means

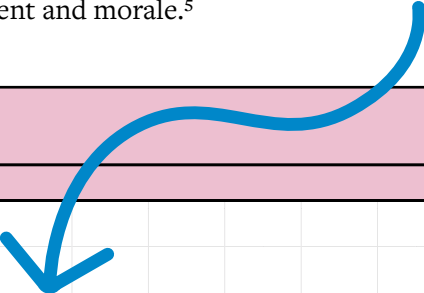
**finding innovative ways
to remain competitive
in the labour market
in order to attract and
retain talent.**

* All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

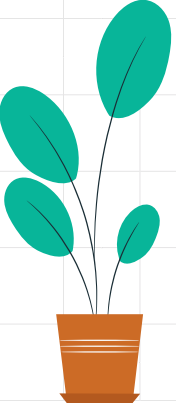

1. World Bank, *Migration and Brain Drain: Europe and Central Asia Economic Update* (Washington, DC, 2019).
2. Agjencioni i Statistikës së Kosovës, *Seria 5: statistikat sociale – anketa e fuqisë punëtore 2021* (Prishtinë, 2022). Available at <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/7218/tregu-i-punes-2021.pdf> (accessed on 6 July 2023).
3. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and IDRA Research and Consulting, *Analysis of Gender-Responsive Family Friendly Policies In Albania* (Pristina, 2022); Kosovo Agency of Statistics, *Series 5: social statistics – labour force survey Q1 2021* (Pristina, 2021). Available at <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6355/lfs-q1-2021.pdf> (accessed on 6 July 2023).
4. UNFPA Moldova, “Why women tend to earn less than men: assessment based on the national transfer accounts”, March 2021.



Against this backdrop, UNFPA’s Expanding Choices project is taking strides to support companies in becoming more attractive to prospective job seekers and making it easier for them to recruit and maintain the workforce they need. The project advocates the implementation of gender-responsive, family-friendly workplace policies, which have been shown to enhance employee retention and mitigate high turnover rates. These policies can lead to a host of positive outcomes, including reduced absenteeism, enhanced worker productivity, higher earnings, increased gender equality and business growth. They also contribute to improved brand equity, talent recruitment and retention, and better employee health, engagement and morale.⁵



The following case studies exemplify how organizations are leveraging such policies to retain talent. They provide a tangible demonstration of how



prioritizing a healthy work–life balance and promoting equitable caregiving opportunities

can support companies in more effectively attracting and retaining talent, thus creating a more sustainable future for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

5. UNFPA, *Family-Friendly Workplace Model* (Istanbul, forthcoming).

Case study: Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo

Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo has taken considerable steps in recent years to become a family-friendly employer and in 2021 partnered with UNFPA's Expanding Choices project.

One of the 19 champion companies in the project, Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo recognized the need for a more supportive work environment for employees with families and, through the guidance and support provided by the project, introduced a suite of new benefits and initiatives. These include extended maternity and paternity leave, flexible working hours, remote work options and a "baby bonus" for new parents. The bank also launched Family Day, a day where employees' family members can visit and learn about their loved ones' workplace and participate in activities. This highlights the effectiveness of the Expanding Choices project in fostering gender-responsive family policies in the private sector and demonstrates the significant impact such initiatives can have on talent attraction and retention.

In addition to policy shifts, Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo understands the importance of the cultural context in creating a family-friendly workplace. The bank integrates local cultural practices into its work environment to foster a sense of community among employees. For example, employees visit their colleagues at home to pay their respects upon the death of a family member, a practice that is deeply ingrained in Kosovo's culture. This not only supports the bereaved employee but also strengthens the bond among employees, fostering a sense of unity and shared experience. Through such practices, the bank cultivates a work environment that respects and values the cultural nuances of its workforce, contributing to a high degree of employee satisfaction and loyalty.

The implementation of these changes was not without challenges. The company faced several external and internal obstacles, such as the country's labour laws and societal expectations around gender roles in parenting. However, Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo took a proactive approach, tackling each challenge head-on. It used open dialogues to challenge societal norms around parenting and shared its initiatives publicly to inspire other companies in the private sector.

One of the most significant successes of these initiatives has been their positive impact on talent retention. While changing practices and attitudes takes time, the company has already reported cases of employees turning down international job offers, choosing instead to stay with Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo due to the supportive, family-friendly work environment the bank provides. Moreover, the company is focusing on the development of employee competencies, providing training and empowering its employees to contribute more effectively to the organization. It is also working on engagement surveys to measure the impact of these initiatives on employee engagement and, by extension, company performance.

The bank's approach to becoming a family-friendly employer is already making a difference in the lives of its employees. But more importantly, it serves as a model for other companies in Kosovo and the region. By providing supportive working conditions and understanding the needs of employees, companies can increase job satisfaction and improve talent retention, thereby increasing their bottom line by addressing absenteeism, turnover and recruitment costs. By investing in its employees and implementing these initiatives,

the bank is not
only improving its
work culture but
also **contributing to
broader social change.**

Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo's approach to creating a family-friendly workplace highlights the power of empathetic and employee-centric policies, a key aspect of the Family-Friendly model developed as part of the Expanding Choices project. As a champion company in the project, Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo has been able to act as a role model for other companies in Kosovo and beyond, showing that investing in employees and promoting a supportive work culture can indeed pay off in talent retention and a more engaged workforce.

Case study: Asena Textil

Asena Textil, a Moldovan champion company deeply rooted in its rural community and a participant in the Expanding Choices project, is spearheading efforts to support its employees' and their families' well-being through the implementation of gender-responsive family policies. The company recognized that

**maintaining a vibrant,
productive workforce
necessitated a
shift in traditional
workplace practices,**

which was made possible through the support and resources provided by the Expanding Choices project.

By designing and enforcing a suite of family-friendly policies, Asena Textil has proven that companies can have a direct impact on talent retention. Flexible schedules enable employees to balance their professional and personal commitments, making work-life integration more achievable. Asena Textil has also sought to ease the burden of childcare, a significant factor in labour force participation, especially for women. The company's efforts to establish accessible childcare facilities close to its factory presents a practical solution, making it easier for working parents to manage their dual roles effectively.

These measures taken by Asena Textil are transforming the workplace into a more supportive environment, significantly enhancing the workplace conditions for employees. The company's initiatives have had far-reaching implications. They have not only enriched the lives of the company's employees and families but have also contributed to the stability of the local community. In providing compelling reasons for workers to stay, Asena Textil is helping stem staff turnover.

Case study: INCA

Companies like INCA, an Albanian champion company in the Expanding Choices project, are formulating innovative solutions to increase talent attraction and retention and improve life in local communities. A significant portion of INCA's employees come from rural areas and own agricultural lands. Recognizing this as a unique opportunity, the company has developed an innovative strategy to support both the welfare of its employees and the development of the local community. In an ambitious initiative, INCA plans to source food supplies for its cafeteria directly from its employees' agricultural holdings.

This approach serves a dual purpose: it provides an additional income source for employees, promoting economic stability and potentially reducing the allure of leaving the company to look for better opportunities, and it fortifies local agriculture, thus contributing to community development.

Guided by the principles of the Expanding Choices project, INCA's innovative strategy embodies a truly gender-responsive, family-friendly environment that simultaneously tackles staff turnover and nurtures local growth. This exemplifies how companies can creatively adapt and apply family-friendly policies in ways that are uniquely suited to their workforce and community context, ultimately supporting the retention of local talent and fostering growth within Albania.



