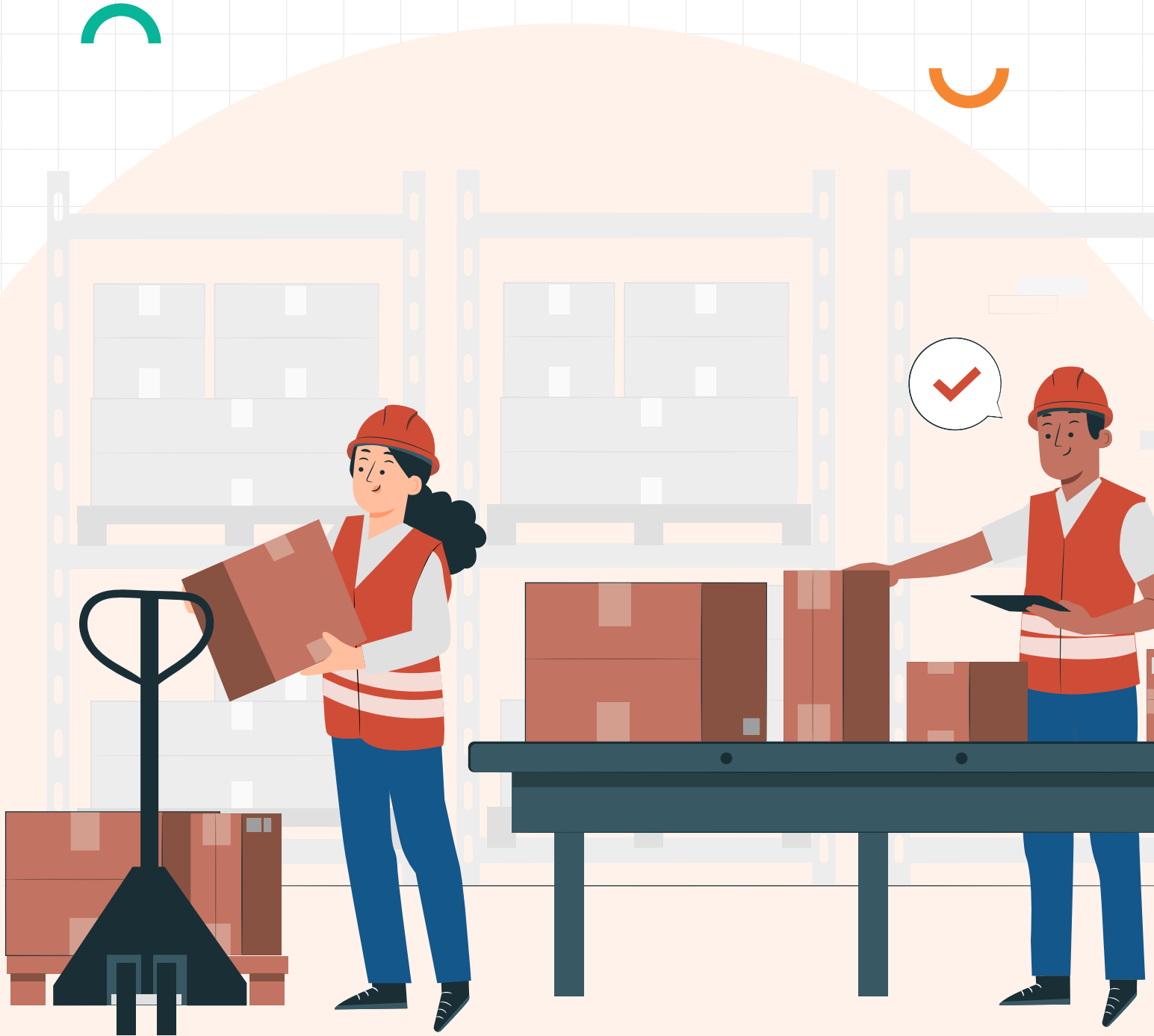
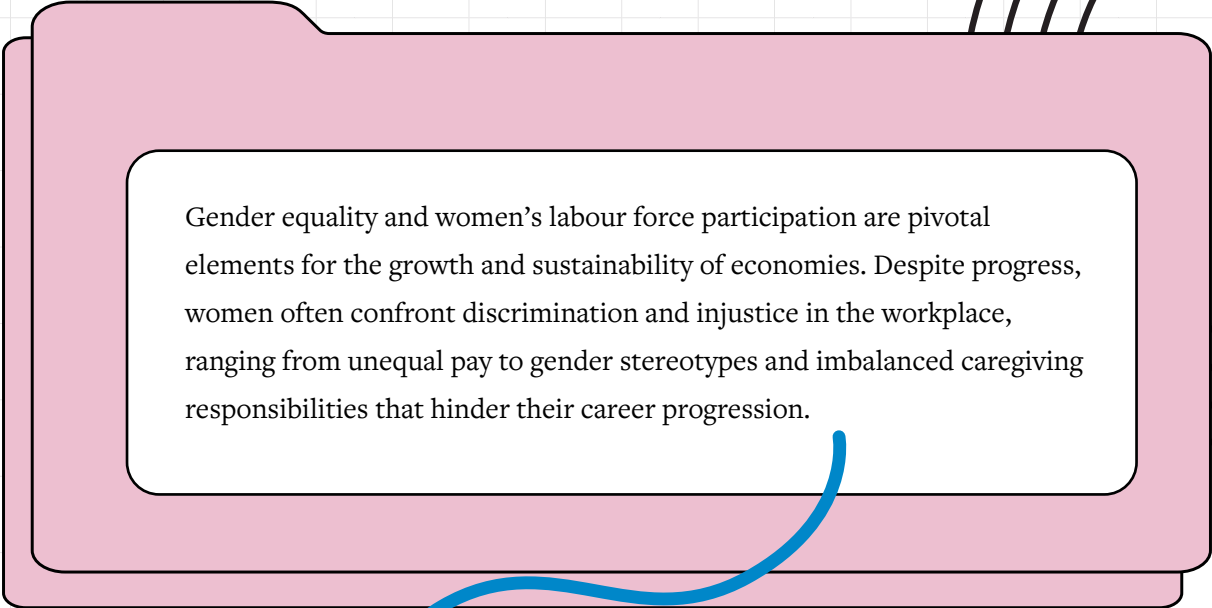
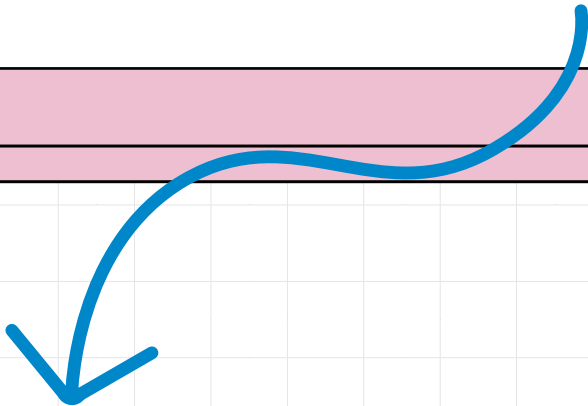


Gender Equality and Family-Friendly Workplaces



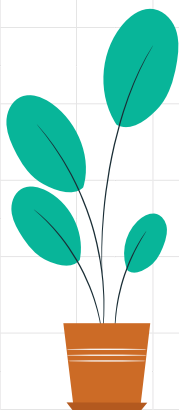


Gender equality and women's labour force participation are pivotal elements for the growth and sustainability of economies. Despite progress, women often confront discrimination and injustice in the workplace, ranging from unequal pay to gender stereotypes and imbalanced caregiving responsibilities that hinder their career progression.



The case studies of champion companies in the Expanding Choices project present how gender-responsive family policies can help companies overcome these obstacles, thereby

fostering gender equality and contributing to **bolstering women's active role in the labour market.**



Supporting female workers in the energy sector: how the Moldovan company Premier Energy promotes economic empowerment and gender equality

The Republic of Moldova's energy sector has traditionally been male-dominated, with women facing barriers in accessing employment and leadership opportunities. Premier Energy, a renewable-energy company, recognized the potential of women in the energy sector and sought to promote gender equality and empower women in the workplace.

As a participant in UNFPA's Expanding Choices regional project, Premier Energy underwent training on the Family-Friendly Workplace (FFW) model.

The model, created as part of the project, aims to support companies in developing tailored strategies to become family-friendly workplaces, which helps them address key business challenges such as high turnover rates, lack of gender balance in the workforce, or difficulties attracting and retaining talent.

Premier Energy conducted a thorough assessment of its policies, highlighting areas for improvement and potential for the implementation of gender-responsive strategies.

In collaboration with national stakeholders, the company then developed and rolled out a comprehensive FFW strategy and action plan that centred on promoting gender equality in



the workplace. This involved implementing leadership development and mentorship programmes specifically designed for women, providing flexible work arrangements to accommodate work-life balance and opening a child-friendly room to support employees with young children.

In addition, Premier Energy also extended its commitment to gender equality beyond its immediate workplace. Recognizing the widespread impact of promoting gender equality, the company initiated an extensive information campaign with support from UNFPA, including printing information about paternity leave on the back of its bills. This move alone helped to educate over 60,000 households about the rights and benefits available to them, furthering the cause of gender equality in the broader community.

Premier Energy's endeavours have resulted in increased gender diversity within its workforce and a more inclusive work culture.

Women now occupy leadership positions, driving the company's success and contributing to a more sustainable energy sector.

The company's efforts to raise awareness of paternity leave laws reached 900,000 people, demonstrating the impact of partnerships with the private sector in influencing societal norms and practices. These efforts were not only confined to the company; they also extended to the wider community, thus showcasing the significant role businesses can play in promoting societal change.

Empowering women and fostering a family-friendly workplace: Asena Textil's journey towards economic empowerment and gender equality

Asena Textil is a company located in the southern region of the Republic of Moldova, employing 1,500 individuals from two villages, Kangas and Taraclia. Its workforce is 93–94 per cent women, with a majority of the employees aged 30–40 years old. Currently, about 250 women are on maternity leave.

The company faced a challenge in breaking cultural norms around the role of the father as the family's provider, while household and child-rearing responsibilities fell to the mother. For the company, the fact that its workforce was predominantly female and that mothers typically bore the brunt of household and childcare responsibilities led to high rates of absenteeism. This dynamic, fuelled by women often leaving their jobs or taking extended leave to cope with unpaid care work, was detrimental to productivity and business continuity. Therefore, the company recognized that working to fix these entrenched norms was imperative for its success. As part of the Expanding Choices project, the company used awareness-raising events for fathers and children to persuade fathers to take paternity leave.



The company also prepares care packages for families with newborns and offers training to remain competitive in the industry. As a result of its gender-responsive family policies, the company saw changes in employee leave patterns, including a few cases of fathers taking paternity leave. Through the project's support, the company established a dedicated play area for employees' children, further underscoring its commitment to fostering a family-friendly work environment that prioritizes the well-being and happiness of its employees and their families.

With the future initiative of building day-care centres near its factory, which is supported by the project, the company aims to better accommodate the needs of parents, as its employees have over 500 children up to 7 years of age. This initiative will make it more convenient for parents to balance work and childcare.

Having been selected as one of the five champion companies in the Republic of Moldova, Asena Textil implemented changes that had a significant impact on employee morale. The family-friendly initiatives adopted by the company resulted in a financial return on investment by effectively reducing turnover costs and boosting the retention rate among female employees, including those returning from maternity leave. These initiatives also fostered a healthier work-life balance, thereby mitigating absenteeism and associated health costs — for instance, when employees had to stay home due to childcare needs.

The company generally experienced a notable increase in revenue, attesting to the **economic benefits of a gender-responsive, family-friendly approach.**

Fostering gender equality through engaged fatherhood: Super Viva's progressive family-friendly policies and their impact on employee satisfaction and productivity

Super Viva, a champion company in the consumer goods sector, has demonstrated a commitment to creating family-friendly workplaces as part of UNFPA's Expanding Choices project. Piloting the Family-Friendly Workplace model, developed as part of the project, Super Viva came up with an action plan to meet the specific needs of its workforce and address its own business challenges. The action plan integrated strategies and recommendations discussed with senior management and boards to ensure that the company's policies aligned with its pursuit of a family-friendly workplace.

The company's philosophy emphasizes the correlation between employee satisfaction and productivity. As Blerta Pacolli, the company's human resources manager, says, "This is how we can retain employees, who will feel happy with the work-life balance, respected and appreciated, but at the same time, we strongly believe that this will also reflect in what the employees can give to the company." Indeed, these progressive policies have shown a positive return on investment for Super Viva, resulting in

**improved employee morale,
reduced turnover and
enhanced productivity.**

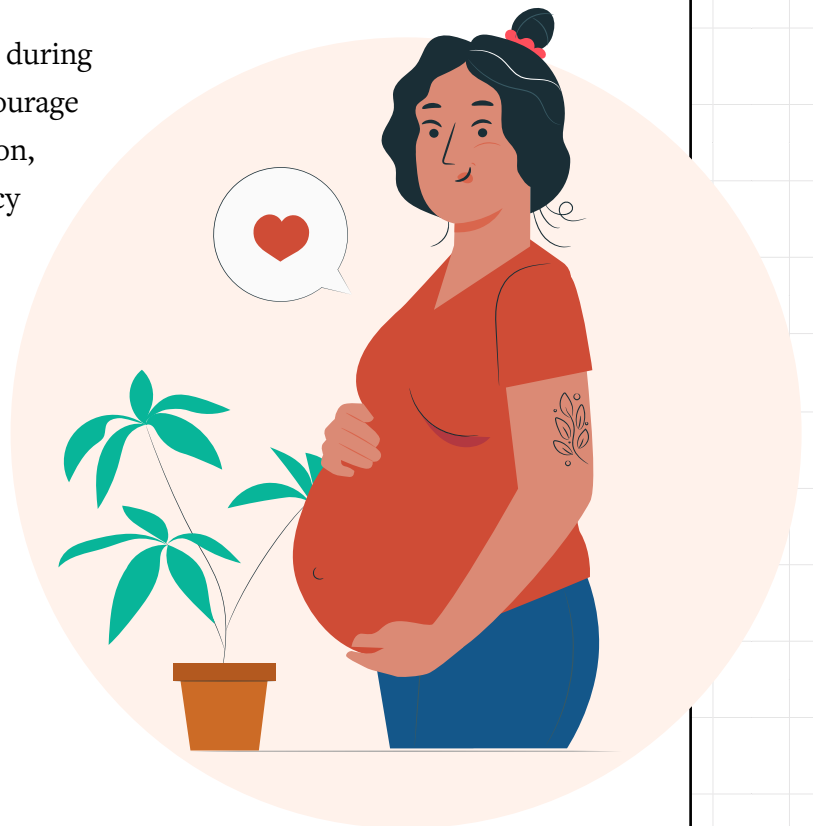
In line with this philosophy and its commitment to gender equality, Super Viva has implemented a number of initiatives that extend beyond Kosovo's* labour law requirements. Notably, the company has extended paternity leave from

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

three to four days, reflecting its commitment to gender equality and supporting the caregiving role of its male employees, who comprise 41 per cent of its workforce.

To further support its employees during significant life events and to encourage women's labour force participation, Super Viva has introduced a policy allowing pregnant workers to reduce their working day from eight hours to seven, while still receiving full pay for an eight-hour day. This initiative, which specifically targets the needs of pregnant employees, demonstrates the company's commitment to a supportive work environment.

Super Viva's engagement in the Expanding Choices project does not stop there. The company is also exploring additional family-friendly policies, such as the provision of health insurance and the creation of dedicated spaces for breastfeeding and pumping. These ongoing efforts showcase Super Viva's dedication to continually enhancing its status as a family-friendly workplace and a leader in promoting gender equality in the workplace.



How champion company INCA promotes women's economic empowerment and gender equality

With a workforce made up of 72 per cent women, INCA, one of the 19 champion companies in the Expanding Choices project, is making strides in the area of women's empowerment in the face of significant economic and social challenges. Located in a region with a significant rural population, INCA faced a predicament where potential female employees could not join the workforce due to the lack of childcare facilities in their villages. Recognizing this barrier to female employment, INCA took the initiative to address this issue head-on.

For the past two years, the company has been actively involved in negotiations and discussions to secure funding for the renovation of a defunct preschool nearby. This facility, located close to the company's factory, has the potential to serve approximately 30 to 40 children, thereby enabling at least 10 to 15 women to join the workforce. By addressing this issue, INCA emphasizes its commitment to facilitating a balance between work and family life for its employees.

However, INCA recognizes that such efforts require cooperation on the part of multiple stakeholders. Hence, through the Expanding Choices project, INCA has engaged with government authorities and project coordinators to collaborate on the funding needed to renovate the preschool. By doing so, INCA embodies its role as a champion company, actively advocating for policies that not only empower employees but also

encourage **collaboration**
between the **public and the**
private sectors.

The project's influence is evident in the broader effects it has had on the company's operations and its interactions with government entities. For

instance, INCA was part of a significant meeting, facilitated by the project, with representatives of the private and public sectors, including ministers of state. This meeting underscored that the private sector was in many ways ahead of the public sector in implementing family-friendly policies. As a result, the company was recognized for its efforts to create a conducive work environment, leading to more proactive support from public authorities.

INCA's managers have also had the opportunity to participate in study visits to and international conferences in Sweden and Turkey organized by the project. These experiences have enabled the company to gather best practices from around the world and integrate them into its own strategies. While the company had always striven to be family-friendly, the project has added structure and strategic thinking to these efforts.

INCA's involvement in the Expanding Choices project has been transformative. Despite the challenges posed by increasing costs and a fluctuating economy, the company continues to prioritize the welfare of its employees, particularly in terms of balancing work and family life. Through initiatives like the proposed preschool renovation and increased cooperation with the government, INCA is setting a strong example of a family-friendly company, empowered by the structure and strategy introduced through the project.

Fostering gender equality and work–life balance: a case study of Lufra’s participation in the Expanding Choices project

Founded in 1992, Lufra, an Albanian company, has grown significantly over the years, currently employing 275 individuals, 85 of whom are women. As part of the Expanding Choices project, Lufra has continually committed to achieving gender equality and supporting women in the workforce.

Ermal, a 10-year veteran in Lufra’s production department, credits the company’s support for his professional growth, especially highlighting the assistance he received when he became a parent. Like Ermal, many employees at Lufra have benefited from family-friendly policies such as parental leave and flexible schedules. These initiatives have ensured that employees do not have to choose between their family responsibilities and their career growth.

The company’s commitment to gender equality and work–life balance has not only benefited male employees but has also created an inclusive environment for female employees. Isida, the Finance Manager at Lufra, is not worried about her impending maternity leave, since she is comfortable in the knowledge that her tasks will be handled by highly specialized staff during her absence. This is a testament to Lufra’s culture of trust and empowerment, which values its employees’ personal lives and professional growth equally.

These policies stem from the company leadership’s understanding of and



commitment to gender equality. Lufra's female co-founder, who herself has navigated the challenges of being a woman in business, emphasizes the company's concerted efforts to provide opportunities for women and girls in the company to grow professionally while maintaining a work-life balance.

Lufra's commitment to a gender-responsive workplace aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the Expanding Choices project. Managed by the UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and supported by the Austrian Development Agency, the project aims to enhance gender-responsive family policies in the private sector. By participating in the project, Lufra has been exposed to best practices and has received the necessary guidance to implement and uphold these policies.

As Luis Ndreka, Lufra's CEO, puts it, "the most precious capital is people". Lufra's commitment to gender equality and women's labour force participation is a reflection of this belief. The Expanding Choices project has played a pivotal role in supporting Lufra's journey towards becoming

a more **inclusive, equitable**
and family-friendly
workplace.

