

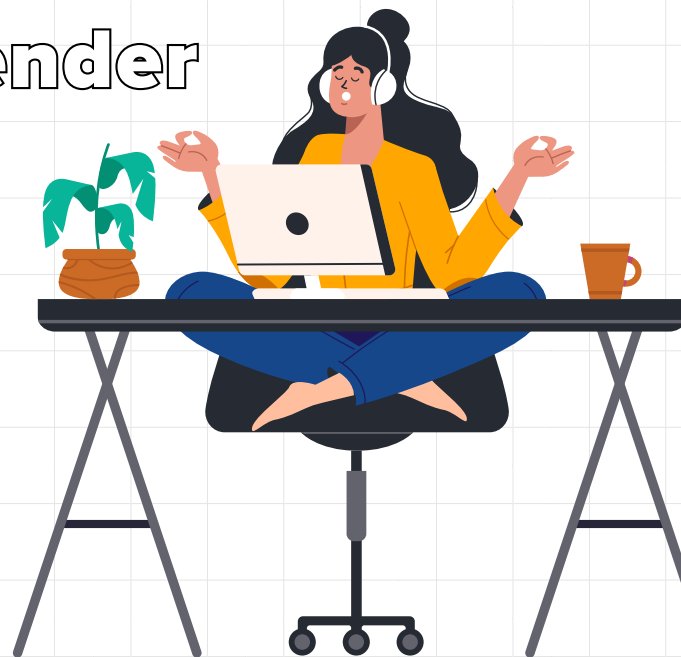
# Empowering Employees through Gender-Responsive Family Policies



Empowering employees is more than just providing professional growth opportunities; it extends to nurturing an environment where they can balance their work with their family lives. Gender-responsive family policies play a pivotal role in achieving this balance, creating a more equitable, inclusive and productive work environment. The champion companies taking part in the Expanding Choices project underscore this philosophy, using a range of innovative strategies to support their employees' dual roles in their professional and personal lives.

Through their unique experiences, the 19 champion companies demonstrate that such policies are not simply about maintaining an engaged workforce but are also crucial to

promoting gender equality and women's participation in the labour force



## INCA – promoting change in a complex environment

INCA, an Albanian company that exports 90 per cent of its products, is facing significant economic and social challenges, including a fluctuating currency exchange rate that has led to a considerable decrease in the company's income. However, as one of the 19 champion companies in the Expanding Choices project, INCA remains committed to its employees' welfare as it responds to significant outmigration and economic challenges. This commitment to employee welfare is not merely theoretical, as illustrated by a recent encounter between an employee and the company director.

The employee, struggling with rising living costs and failing to make ends meet, approached the director to request a wage increase. Given the economic predicament faced by the company, a direct wage increase was not feasible. Rather than dismissing the employee's concern, however, the director took the opportunity to delve deeper into the employee's situation. The employee shared that he was burdened with medical expenses for his sick mother and wife, costs that were depleting his monthly wages. Recognizing the severity of the employee's plight, the director promptly involved the company doctor. Upon evaluation, it was found that the employee's mother was eligible for government assistance due to her prolonged illness, a provision that had previously been overlooked.



Through this intervention, the company was able to alleviate the employee's financial burden by around EUR 70–80 per month — substantial relief in the context of the employee's financial hardship. This approach did not just provide immediate help; it also embodied INCA's proactive stance in empowering its employees by guiding them towards available resources and solutions.

INCA's commitment to its employees is also evident in the case of the head of its warehouse, a dedicated employee and father who was facing issues in balancing his parental responsibilities with his work schedule. Despite the business's immediate efficiency concerns, the company recognized the importance of a balanced family life and adjusted his schedule, demonstrating its adherence to its family-friendly ethos. This choice showcases INCA's willingness to prioritize employee well-being, even when faced with increasing inflation and higher costs, thus making a significant difference in its employees' lives. These instances of employee-centric decisions reflect the influence of the Expanding Choices project on INCA's management practices.

The Expanding Choices project exposed INCA's management to international best practices, equipping them with valuable insights to manage the dual challenges of maintaining a family-friendly environment and addressing economic issues. Despite the challenges, INCA has shown resilience and growth, adding 12 new employees to its workforce in 2022.



Recognizing the unique potential of its rural workforce, INCA is putting innovation to work in its approach to employee well-being. Many of its employees hail from rural areas and possess agricultural land, a fact the company has turned into an opportunity. In an upcoming project, INCA plans to source food supplies for its cafeteria directly from employees' own agricultural lands. This initiative not only provides an additional income source for employees but also bolsters local agriculture, making it a win-win solution that underscores INCA's commitment to both employee welfare and community development. These innovative strategies for employee welfare have been largely inspired and guided by the Expanding Choices project, which has been instrumental in shaping INCA's approach to a family-friendly environment.

The Expanding Choices project has provided INCA with a structured framework to strategically implement family-friendly policies. INCA recognizes the return on its investment in implementing family-friendly workplace policies and continues to invest in these strategies, despite the prevailing economic challenges. The company remains committed to

## balancing **business** **profitability** and **employee well-being**

as evidenced by its continuous initiatives aimed at enhancing work-life balance, nurturing a supportive work environment, and fostering employee growth and satisfaction. In the face of adversity, INCA's journey serves as a testament to the importance and viability of a balanced approach to business and employee well-being.

# Employee empowerment and work–life balance: how Raiffeisen Bank Albania embraces gender-responsive family policies

Through its involvement in the Expanding Choices project, Raiffeisen Bank Albania has implemented gender-responsive family policies designed to empower employees and address the unique challenges faced by working parents. The bank showcases a remarkable commitment to advancing gender equality and bolstering women’s labour force participation. With the aid of the project, the bank leveraged flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies to cultivate an inclusive and supportive work environment.

One significant initiative that the project influenced was the introduction of work–life balance measures, such as hybrid work options and extra days off. As a result of these changes, 76 employees have already taken advantage of the opportunity to take a day off for their birthday, and employees gain an additional day off for every five years of service time. For young mothers, the bank offers flexible work arrangements, including shortened workdays to accommodate their needs, such as paid time for breastfeeding. The Expanding Choices project influenced this shift, helping the bank realize the importance of these provisions for its employees’ well-being and job satisfaction.



To better communicate its family-friendly policies, the bank utilized its internal social media and communication materials. This move, inspired by the project's inputs, ensured that employees were well informed about the available resources, thus enhancing the supportiveness and inclusivity of the work environment. The bank conducts annual surveys to measure employee satisfaction, with the engagement rate surpassing 80 per cent in 2022. Though it is difficult to attribute this directly to family-friendly policies, there are indications — such as high scores for work-life balance, a key component introduced by the Expanding Choices project — that these measures have made

a significant contribution  
to the bank's **positive  
work environment.**

One direct outcome of the bank's participation in the project was the introduction of a policy on extended paternity leave, offering 10 days off for new fathers or those who have adopted a child. Eight employees have already benefited from this progressive policy, thus challenging conventional gender roles and encouraging shared familial responsibilities. Additionally, the bank organizes seminars on maternity and paternity leave, providing employees with crucial resources and tools to navigate the life-changing period of parenthood. These seminars, along with monthly wellness sessions led by experts from various fields, have been guided and informed by the Expanding Choices project. The feedback and insights gleaned from the project's sessions have helped the bank package and communicate these initiatives more effectively, aligning them more closely with employees' needs.

# **Empowering employees through gender-responsive family policies: a case study of R&T, a champion company**

R&T, a leading Albanian company, recognized the importance of gender-responsive family policies in attracting and retaining top talent, especially among younger employees. The company aimed to implement gender-responsive family policies that would support work–life balance and provide alternative childcare services to employees with children.

As part of UNFPA’s Expanding Choices regional project, R&T partnered with national stakeholders to improve family policies. The company introduced a range of gender-responsive family policies, including flexible working hours, remote work options, and parental leave for both mothers and fathers. R&T also partnered with local childcare providers to offer discounted childcare services to employees.

R&T’s gender-responsive family policies have had a positive impact on the lives of its employees. Young parents, like Jona and Lirim, have been able to take parental leave and spend more time with their children without sacrificing their careers. The flexible working hours and remote work options have enabled employees to balance their work and family responsibilities, improving their well-being and job satisfaction. The partnership with local childcare providers has also helped alleviate the burden of childcare for employees with young children.

R&T’s efforts to support gender-responsive family policies have been successful in attracting and retaining top talent, improving the well-being and job satisfaction of its employees and promoting gender equality in the workplace. The company’s commitment to empowering its employees through gender-responsive family policies has also demonstrated its leadership in promoting progressive workplace practices in Albania.



