


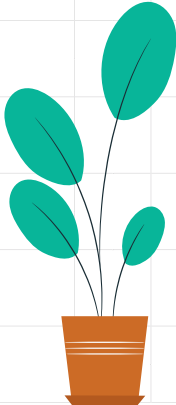



Promoting Inclusive Practices through the Private Sector





The Expanding Choices project in Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Kosovo* promotes gender-responsive family policies to create more inclusive and supportive work environments. These policies recognize the importance of balancing work and family responsibilities for both men and women, fostering gender equality, and empowering employees to thrive in their personal and professional lives. As part of this initiative, the project collaborates with 19 champion companies in these countries and territories to drive positive change. Champion companies, such as Orange Moldova and Raiffeisen Bank Albania, are exemplary in their commitment to promoting gender-responsive and inclusive practices and advancing diversity and family-friendly workplaces through the implementation of gender-responsive family policies.



Through their strategic actions and corporate dedication, the 19 champion companies are reshaping traditional norms and fostering healthier, more inclusive workplace cultures, showcasing the
transformative potential of the Expanding Choices project.

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

Breaking barriers

Orange Moldova's pioneering approach to family-friendly workplaces through its fathers' club initiative

In its effort to understand the needs of its employees better, Orange Moldova conducted mood surveys. The feedback received from these surveys provided invaluable insights concerning areas for improvement, such as a desire for online meetings with mental-health professionals and events for children. In response, the company offered free psychological consultations to employees, gradually reducing the stigma surrounding seeking help from a mental-health professional.

As part of its family-friendly initiatives, Orange Moldova tracked the number of men taking paternity leave compared with the number of women taking maternity leave and aimed to increase paternity leave uptake. Although paternity leave was financially less advantageous than regular leave, some employees, encouraged by the company's support, chose to take it to spend more time with their families. In addition, Orange Moldova introduced an initiative to establish a fathers' club. Initially, male employees who felt that their parenting skills were being judged resisted the initiative. Through effective communication, however, the company reassured them that the club's purpose was to provide support and resources, not to judge their parenting abilities. Seventeen employees joined the club, with varying attendance depending on their workload.

The fathers' club provided a platform for employees to grow and develop both personally and professionally. Participating employees felt comfortable discussing their concerns, which, in turn, helped them become better fathers



and employees. This positive impact is best encapsulated in the words of Sergiu Placinta, director of the International Operations Department, who expressed his enthusiasm as one of the first participants in the newly established fathers' club at Orange Moldova: "As a father of three children and a director, I was among the first who accepted to participate in the recently created fathers' club at [Orange Moldova]. Through such family-friendly initiatives, we grow and develop personally and professionally in both roles: as fathers and as employees."

The fathers' club held online meetings via Zoom, creating a safe space for members to discuss their concerns without feeling judged. In an effort to offer holistic support, the club also organized an offline meeting with a specialist, using the company's play area for children while the employees attended the session.

By thinking creatively and trying new initiatives, Orange Moldova is helping to change the workplace culture in the Republic of Moldova,



breaking down the cultural stigma around discussing personal issues **and seeking help from mental-health professionals.**

The company's motto of "Let's try", innovative approaches and outside-the-box thinking reflect its commitment to employee well-being.

Case study

Raiffeisen Bank Albania: a champion of inclusive employment

Raiffeisen Bank Albania, a champion company in the Expanding Choices project, showcases a robust commitment to diversity and inclusion within its workforce. This commitment was largely inspired and enhanced by the bank's active participation in the project's initiatives and discussions around promoting inclusivity for marginalized groups.

The bank collaborates with the Agency for Employment in Albania, a partnership that was initiated as part of the Expanding Choices project's broader push for inclusivity. The partnership resulted in the bank implementing measures to hire people with disabilities, ultimately leading to the successful employment of two individuals with disabilities. This initiative showcases the bank's resolve to fight discrimination and create a workforce that mirrors the diversity of the society it serves.

Inspired by the project's inclusivity initiatives, Raiffeisen Bank also positioned itself as an LGBT-friendly employer. The bank introduced a fast-track recruitment process specifically designed to provide individuals who might otherwise face discrimination with an unbiased assessment and equal employment opportunity.

A particularly heartening initiative is the bank's collaboration with an organization for people with Down syndrome. Taking forward the spirit of inclusivity fostered by the Expanding Choices project, the bank now proudly employs four individuals with Down syndrome.



These initiatives by Raiffeisen Bank Albania illustrate the potential and success of the Expanding Choices project's endeavours. The bank's transformation into a more inclusive employer echoes the values the project promotes,

underlining the significant role of corporations in fostering **diversity, equality and social progress.**

Through this case, it is evident how the project not only inspires but also aids organizations in translating the rhetoric of inclusion into tangible actions.

