

# EXPANDING CHOICES

## Gender-Responsive Family Policies for the Private Sector in the Western Balkans and Moldova

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, women spend on average three hours more than men, per day, on unpaid care work<sup>1</sup>. Coupled with low availability of child and elder care, limited parental leave and lack of flexible work arrangements, this is forcing women to make a decision between having children and having a career. This leads to some of the lowest female participation rates across Europe and even globally for some of the countries in this region. The same traditional gender norms and roles as well as institutions and policies that promote women's domestic and unpaid care roles above all else, also affect men, constraining them into the role of breadwinner. Moreover, while many men in the region may want to spend more time with their children, social and economic pressures and lack of gender-responsive policies and provisions often prevent them from doing so<sup>2</sup>. As a result, many women end up with fewer children than they want, or are unable to fulfil their career potential, affecting both fertility rates and economic growth in these countries.

The programme, **Expanding Choices: Gender-Responsive Family Policies for the Private Sector in the Western Balkans and Moldova**, implemented by UNFPA since 2019 in Albania, Kosovo and Moldova, aims to expand choices for women so that they can fulfil their career, family and fertility aspirations by supporting gender-responsive family policies in the private sector and at national level.

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Ukraine 2020 | Valentyn Kuzan - UNFPA Ukraine



## THE ISSUES

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### Caregiving and domestic responsibilities significantly burden women, reducing their labour force participation

For example, in Albania 34% of women and girls (15-29) are neither in school nor working because of their household duties. And it's no wonder, as women spend 5 hours more a day on unpaid care work than men<sup>3</sup>.

### Maternalistic policies that grant generous leave for mothers but overlook the role of fathers are a barrier for men to equally share unpaid care responsibilities

For example, paternity leave in Kosovo is 2 days, and no provisions exist for parental leave for men in Kosovo or Albania in the national legal framework.

### In the region, attitudes and social norms based on rigid gender roles restrict women's and men's choices

For example, in 66% of households with children in Moldova, women are the one staying home when the child is sick, and 76% of people in Moldova agree that women are better at caring for children<sup>4</sup>.

## THE SOLUTIONS

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### Engaging the private sector to develop tailored solutions that support employees to better balance their unpaid care and work responsibilities while addressing key business needs

The private sector is a critical partner in catalysing sustainable development. Small shifts within the business model, daily operations, staff practices, or external communications can have huge implications. By implementing policies and practices around supporting the unpaid care responsibilities of all employees, not just women, the private sector will play a critical role in improving the role and recognition of men as caregivers. This will reduce the pressure on women and allow them to meet their career aspirations.

### Working with governments to strengthen gender-responsive family policies at the national level and provide choices for women and men to fulfil their fertility, family and career aspirations

Research shows that there is a strong relation between countries' national parental leave, existing childcare support arrangements and labour force participation of mothers. Governments in the region have incorporated commitments to gender equality and family policies in their development and policy plans. UNFPA supports these goals by increasing knowledge on the benefits gender-responsive family policies have on gender equality, the labour market, the economy and fertility rates, and working with governments to strengthen such policies.

### Combating gender stereotypes and gender norms that place women as caregivers and men as breadwinners, to ensure everyone plays an equal role in households, economies and societies

Limited private sector and government policies are rooted in underlying inequitable gender norms, stereotypes and values. Improving policies and access to family-friendly initiatives will ensure choices for women only if societies move away from restrictive gender norms for both women and men, and men use these policies to take a greater role in the care of their children, relatives and the household. Engaging men in gender equality, especially in taking a more equal role in unpaid care and domestic work is crucial.



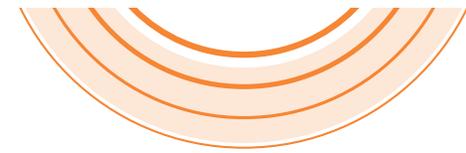
### In the project's first year,

- A four-step model to support companies in planning, piloting and monitoring tailor-made family friendly workplaces initiative has been designed by UNFPA and its family policy expert partner, ParentSmart Employer from Sweden.
- Key partners, including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Moldova, the Chamber of Commerce in Kosovo, and the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Albania have joined and/or support the project to promote the Family-Friendly Workplace model.
- [26 Champion Companies](#) in Albania, Kosovo and Moldova have joined the project to pilot the Family-Friendly Workplace model.
- More than 7,500 employees from both national and international companies, 54% approximately of whom are women, will benefit from more gender-responsive family policies at work, allowing them to better balance their work and care responsibilities.
- 3 business networks have also come on board to advocate for family-friendly workplaces within their platforms and members.



### In the project's first year,

- A tool to map the policy landscapes, from a gender and family policy perspective has been created.
- A mapping was conducted of national policies for [gender equality](#), and supporting [working parents and caregivers](#).
- The [gaps in gender-responsive national family policies](#) that could be addressed through this project, and the key government stakeholders to work with, have been identified.



### In the project's first year,

- Awareness has been increased through a campaign on the impact family friendly workplaces can have on gender equality and mothers' return to work has been launched at regional and national levels.
- Similarly a campaign and advocacy messages on how businesses can actively support men to become more equal partners and engaged fathers has been launched at regional and national levels.
- Information and knowledge on the importance of family-friendly workplaces for both employees and businesses have been disseminated.



Serbia 2016 | Branko Birac - UNFPA Serbia

## WHAT'S NEXT

- Champion companies will pilot the family-friendly workplace model and promote gender-responsive family policies and initiatives that work for businesses and employees.
- The family-friendly workplace model and tools will be tested and refined, to scale and replicate the model beyond the pioneer champion companies and countries.
- Best practices and lessons learned emerging from the region, and globally, will be shared to build the evidence and knowledge of governments, private sector and CSOs.
- Partnerships with civil society, business associations and the public sector will be strengthened to address harmful gender stereotypes, and promote family friendly policies at national level and in the private sector to expand choices for women and men.
- Governments will be supported to make family policies more gender responsive and ensure provisions to support families and their care responsibilities, in order to expand the choices of everyone, regardless of gender.



<sup>1</sup> UNFPA & Promundo, 2018. [Engaging Men in Unpaid Care Work: An Advocacy Brief for Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#).

<sup>2</sup> Women's Law Center, 2015. [Men and Gender Equality in the Republic of Moldova](#).

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA & IDRA, 2020. [Analysis of Gender-Responsive Family-Friendly Policies in Albania](#).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics, UNFPA, NIDI-GGP, 2020. Republic of Moldova - Generations and Gender Survey.