

CHILDCARE, WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19: THE CASE OF MOLDOVA



2021

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UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

This report is the result of a collaboration between UNECE and UN Women in the frame of the United Nations Development Account tranche 13 project: Strengthening Social Protection for Pandemic Response, in particular its workstream on strengthening care policies with a gender lens, implemented with the participation of UN regional commissions and cooperating partners, including UN Women regional offices.

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Cover photo credit: UN Women Moldova/Andrei Bogus

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ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	SARS-CoV2 Respiratory Virus
CPD	Center “Parteneriat pentru Dezvoltare” Public Association
CCF	“Child, Community and Family” Public Association
EEI	Early Education Institution
ENPHC	Extraordinary National Public Health Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
LPA	Local Public Authority
MECR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research
MHLSP	Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
UN Women	United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
WB	World Bank

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis and one of the greatest tests that Moldova is currently facing. Although it started as a health crisis, it resulted in major repercussions on the social protection and assistance system, causing large disruptions in economic activity and limiting social life to dangerous levels.

Since March 2020, the public administration system operates in a continuous state of emergency to provide solutions to the problems generated by the crisis. The government implemented a series of countermeasures to reduce the rate of infection with the new virus, but the effectiveness of most of these interventions was proven to be far lower than originally planned. A reason for this failure is that the decision-making mechanism is not transparent and does not involve all the stakeholders in the process of identifying the most appropriate solutions. Thus, the proposed actions did not cover the specific needs of different population groups. The generalized approach resulted in the deepening of inequalities and increased the poverty risk for many population groups, which were already facing a range of challenges before the pandemic. Measures that have been imposed to reduce the spread of the virus had undesirable effects on the level of economic development, tax collection, and investment. However, the pandemic crisis has generated higher pending in the areas of health, education, care, and social protection.

The pandemic had a detrimental impact on

women living in Moldova, who even before the pandemic faced several inequalities that limited their opportunities for social, economic, and political participation, inequalities that are generated by gender stereotypes that became even more evident during the pandemic. This study looks at the impact of the pandemic on Moldovan women, specifically, the changes that have taken place in the labor market and to what extent did they affect women's employment and welfare. The topic is analyzed in conjunction with other issues, such as access to public services that must exist and facilitate women's economic activism. It is noteworthy that, from the beginning of the pandemic, there has been a decrease in the employment rate of women in the labor market. This was largely dictated by the closure of preschool education services, which put several families in the position to choose which of the parents would leave work to care for their children. The study examines existing pre-school education services, including the coverage rate at the national level, the accessibility for families with children, and how they operate and are funded. A part of this study is dedicated to the analysis of gender stereotypes and how they influence the employment of women during the pandemic in Moldova. It also reviews the government's plans for economic recovery and provides a series of recommendations that promote women's economic participation and gender-sensitive policies to address Moldova's economic problems.

SUMMARY

The Republic of Moldova has made international and national commitments to promote gender equality and to facilitate the empowerment of women. Actions have been taken to follow these commitments and, to a certain extent, progress was achieved.

Despite the positive changes in the national legislation and the efforts made to improve women's welfare in Moldova, certain vulnerabilities and gaps are still to be addressed. The Moldovan society shares strong gender stereotypes, and the perceptions of traditional gender roles are still deeply rooted in the mentality of most individuals.

Women in Moldova face specific labor market barriers. Persistent patriarchal attitudes and the insufficient development of care services limit their employment options, a fact confirmed by the employment rate. In 2019 the employment rate of women aged between 25-49 years old, with children aged between 0-6 years, was 39.4%, by 23.1% lower than that of men with children in the same age group. In contrast, the employment rate of women without children (25-49 years) was 62.9% with 6.4% higher than the employment rate

moved automatically onto the household members, particularly on women. More than 51.2% of women reported that, during the pandemic, the number of hours dedicated to schoolwork with children was higher and 54% of them mentioned that they are generally spending more time for household-related activities². Household responsibilities account for the largest share of the day of a woman – 4.6 hours among the total population and 3.8 hours among employed women. Men mostly use the largest share of their time for paid work – 3.9 hours on average among the total population.

In the second quarter of 2020, 30.9% of women were affected in some form by the pandemic at the workplace, versus only 18.5% of men. At the same time, in 2020, the higher share of NEET women aged 15-29 (40.3% versus 21.2% NEET men)³ suggests more women are at risk of facing difficult job market prospects. Moreover, employed women face wage disparities that represent, in 2020, 14.1%⁴, and women represent the vast majority of the population employed in lower-paying occupations women in education 82.2%, health and social assistance sector - 80.2%.

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