MINISTERUL MUNCII
ȘI PROTECȚIEI SOCIALE
AL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA

UNFPA

India-UN Development
Partnership Fund

Elveția.

nidi
netherlands
interdisciplinary
demographic
institute

Gender Inequality and Work-Life Balance in Moldova

longitudinal analysis based on Generations and Gender Survey

Chișinău 2025

Authors:
Dr Thomas Emery, Erasmus University Rotterdam
Dr Alzbeta Bartova, Leiden University

This analysis was developed under the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) to provide in-depth, targeted insights based on the GGS data and to support national authorities in designing evidence-based policies that strengthen the demographic resilience of the Republic of Moldova.

The Generations and Gender Programme is implemented by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA Moldova) in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Institute of Demography (NIDI). The Programme is funded by the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, the Government of Switzerland, and UNFPA Moldova.

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is the most comprehensive longitudinal demographic study carried out in the Republic of Moldova, with Wave I conducted in 2020 and Wave II in 2024, as part of the international programme coordinated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and NIDI. The study's conclusions will help decision-makers better understand the demographic transformations underway in the country and support the development of people-centred demographic policies tailored to the population's needs. In addition, the findings of this analysis will assist the authorities in identifying measures that turn current demographic challenges into opportunities for sustainable development and for advancing demographic resilience in Moldova.

For references: *Republic of Moldova – Generations and Gender Survey wave II (2024). Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, National Bureau of Statistics (study sample), UNFPA Moldova, NIDI-GGP (partner and data distributor).*

This document was produced with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the Republic of Moldova and does not necessarily reflect the views of UNFPA Moldova or any of their affiliated organizations.

Executive Summary

While most Moldovans support women's employment and political leadership, 93% still believe women's fulfillment is tied to motherhood. This paradox shapes a society where women face a disproportionate "second shift" of unpaid domestic work alongside paid employment.

Using longitudinal evidence from the Generations and Gender Survey (2020–2024), this report highlights three core findings. First, gender attitudes remain stable and traditional: while men and women equally endorse education, work, and political participation, only one in four believes both genders are equally suited to family caregiving. These patterns are consistent across cohorts, education, and urban–rural divides.

Second, household labor is highly unequal: women perform the majority of daily chores regardless of parenthood status, with 68% of couples reporting women doing at least three-quarters of tasks. Parenthood does not intensify inequality, since roles are already highly skewed prior to having children.

Third, work–life balance challenges are widespread, with women more frequently reporting exhaustion, difficulty managing responsibilities, and dissatisfaction with fairness at home. Higher education improves women's ability to balance paid work but exacerbates household strain, as domestic expectations remain unchanged.

Despite advances through a new round of policy reforms, cultural norms remain a major obstacle. Fathers' uptake of parental leave is still low, childcare coverage remains limited, and women continue to feel disproportionately burdened. The report concludes that bridging the gap between formal equality and lived reality will require sustained action: public campaigns to normalize fathers' caregiving, expansion of affordable childcare, family-friendly workplace reforms, education to challenge stereotypes, and ongoing monitoring through surveys like GGS.

1. Introduction

Moldova is at a socio-demographic crossroads where gender inequality in the home and workplace has become a critical concern for sustainable development. While the country has made progress in women's education and public participation, traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched in private life. Most Moldovans continue to believe that a woman's fulfillment is tied to motherhood and family life with over 90% saying that for a woman to have a fulfilled life, they must have children.

Similarly, the role of women as primary caregivers is exalted. In a recent national values survey, Moldova ranked among the most traditional societies in the world in affirming that "what women truly want is to be good mothers and wives," scoring comparably to countries like Iran and Egypt and higher than almost any European country[1]. At the same time, however, there is broad acceptance of women's public roles. Attitudes toward women as leaders or professionals are moderate to positive – for instance, Moldovans' support for women in political office is similar to the European average (on par with countries like Romania and Serbia)[2]. This paradoxical mix of modern and traditional views creates a complex context for gender equality.

[1] https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/eng_study_equality_perceptions.pdf
[2] ibid

Against this backdrop, the division of unpaid domestic labor and the ability of individuals to balance work and family demands have direct implications for Moldova's social and economic health. Women's disproportionate burden of housework and caregiving, the so-called "second shift", is known to constrain their career advancement, earnings, and political participation[3]. It can also influence demographic trends. When starting a family entails a high cost to women's work and well-being, couples may delay childbearing or have fewer children, contributing to the low fertility rates observed in Moldova. Indeed, research across countries shows that where gender equality in the home has improved, fertility decline often moderates – a concept described by Goldscheider et al. (2015) as the "second half" of the gender revolution needed to reconcile women's roles with family aspirations[4]. In Moldova's case, bridging the gap between formal gender equality and substantive equality in daily life is essential for empowering women and fostering a family-friendly society.

This report examines gender inequality and work–life balance in Moldova using rich longitudinal data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). We analyze Wave 1 (2020) and Wave 2 (2024) of the GGS to assess: (a) changes in attitudes toward gender roles and gender equality over time and across cohorts; (b) the extent and evolution of inequalities in unpaid domestic work (household chores and caregiving), with particular focus on parents and married couples; and (c) the state of work–life balance, including conflicts between job and family responsibilities and perceptions of fairness in the division of labor. By grounding the analysis in empirical evidence, we aim to provide policy-makers and UNFPA stakeholders with an objective, detailed picture of where Moldova stands and where it is heading on these issues.

The period between 2020 and 2024 was marked by significant external challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic and the spillover effects of the war in neighboring Ukraine – as well as policy responses in Moldova to support families. These contexts are important. The pandemic forced many families into new arrangements (e.g. juggling telework and childcare) that may have temporarily shifted domestic roles or reinforced inequalities. The war-induced economic strains (energy price shocks, inflation) further tested household resilience, potentially exacerbating stress around work and care. Recognizing these factors, the analysis will also discuss how recent policy measures, such as expanded parental leave for fathers, childcare services, and more generous maternity benefits introduced in 2022, align with the findings.

2. Conceptual Framework

Achieving gender equality in work–life balance involves multiple interrelated concepts: gender egalitarian attitudes, the division of domestic labor, and the capacity for individuals to balance work and family roles. We define each of these and outline how they are measured and understood in the context of Moldova, drawing on sociological and demographic theory.

Gender Egalitarian Attitudes

These refer to beliefs and values regarding the appropriate roles of women and men in society, specifically whether both genders should share responsibilities in public and private life on equal footing or whether they should adhere to traditional, specialized roles. In surveys, such attitudes are gauged through agreement or disagreement with statements about gender roles. For example,

[3] ibid

[4] Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E., & Lappegård, T. (2015). The gender revolution: A framework for understanding changing family and demographic behavior. *Population and development review*, *41*(2), 207-239.

respondents may be asked if they think "men should have priority in jobs when unemployment is high" or if "a preschool child suffers when the mother works full-time."

An egalitarian-minded person would reject the notion that men are naturally better leaders or that a woman's place is exclusively in the home, whereas a traditional-minded person would endorse such statements. These attitudes form an index of gender role egalitarianism, often scaled such that a higher score indicates more equality-minded views. Research suggests that gender attitudes can change across generations (younger cohorts often espouse more egalitarian ideals) and in response to structural changes like education and economic development.

However, attitudes can also reflect deep-rooted cultural norms that are slow to shift. In Moldova's case, previous studies showed strong support for women's education and employment rights on one hand, but simultaneously a persistent belief in women's primary role as caregivers[5]. Understanding these attitudes is crucial, as they influence behavior. For instance, couples with more egalitarian beliefs tend to share tasks more equally, and societies with egalitarian norms exhibit narrower gender gaps in various outcomes.

Domestic Labor and Care Work

This encompasses the unpaid work done to maintain a household and care for family members – cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping for groceries, and caring for children or dependent relatives. Historically and globally, domestic labor has been disproportionately performed by women, often considered "women's work" in traditional gender contracts[6]. The gender division of domestic labor refers to how these tasks are split (or not split) between women and men in a household. A truly egalitarian division would mean both partners contribute roughly equally to all types of chores and care activities. A traditional division, by contrast, often means women handle most or all routine housework and child-rearing tasks, while men may focus on paid work and perhaps occasional tasks (in Moldova, as in many places, men more commonly do repairs or heavy outdoor chores).

The GGS captures this through questions asking each partner who "usually" or "always" performs certain tasks – allowing us to categorize households as female-dominated, male-dominated, or shared in each task. It also asks respondents how satisfied they are with the division of household tasks, which provides insight into perceived fairness. The literature on housework indicates that even as women entered the workforce in large numbers (the "first half" of the gender revolution), the adjustments in domestic roles lagged behind – creating a stall in gender equality progress[7].

However, when men increase their participation at home, it correlates with better outcomes for women (less stress, higher employment retention) and for men themselves (closer parent–child relationships, etc.). In analyzing Moldova, we consider not only how tasks are divided at a point in time, but how life events like marriage or parenthood alter that division. Often, the transition to parenthood has a "traditionalizing" effect on couples – even those who shared chores relatively equally may revert to more traditional roles after a baby arrives, due to a mix of practical demands (e.g., breastfeeding, maternity leave) and normative expectations. Our conceptual approach anticipates such shifts and looks for evidence of them between GGS waves.

---

[5] https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/eng_study_equality_perceptions.pdf

[6] Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (1989). Working parents and the revolution at home. *New York: Viking*, *258*, 262.

[7] Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *Incomplete revolution: Adapting welfare states to women's new roles*. Polity.

Work–Life Balance

This concept refers to the equilibrium between an individual's work obligations (career, paid employment) and personal life responsibilities (family, leisure, self-care). Good work–life balance means one can fulfill job duties and also have time/energy to care for family and oneself, without excessive stress. When work–life balance is poor, people experience conflict in one direction or both: work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict.

GGS Wave 2, conducted after the pandemic onset, explicitly measured some of these aspects. Respondents were asked if in the last months they had come home from work too tired to do chores, or if they had difficulties concentrating at work because of family responsibilities. These indicators allow us to quantify work–family strain. Work–life balance is not only a personal issue but a structural one. It depends on workplace policies (e.g., flexibility, parental leave), state support (childcare availability), and gender norms (which determine whether men share the load at home or whether women are expected to "do it all").

In Moldova, work–life balance challenges are pronounced for many. Women have a labor force participation rate that lags behind men, often attributed to their caregiving burdens and the lack of widespread childcare services (especially for children under 3). Three-quarters of Moldovans believe a young child may suffer if the mother works, a view that can pressure women to withdraw from the workforce or take on less demanding jobs when they have children. Concurrently, men have not traditionally taken on an equal share of home duties, which means women who do work for pay often face a double workload.

We approach work–life balance in this analysis by examining reported conflicts, the availability of supportive arrangements (e.g., how many have access to flexible hours), and subjective satisfaction with how things are managed. The fairness perception is key: if women feel the division of labor is unfair (and our data show they do, at twice the rate of men), it signals unmet needs and likely stress, even if they aren't dropping out of work altogether.

Links between concepts

Underpinning this framework is an understanding of how these elements connect. Attitudes shape behavior – a husband who believes strongly in gender equality is more likely to support and engage in housework and childcare, and a wife with egalitarian views may negotiate for a more balanced arrangement or feel justified in expecting her partner to contribute. Conversely, persistent traditional attitudes can reinforce an unequal status quo at home. But behavior also shapes attitudes over time; for instance, younger men who grow up seeing their fathers share in cooking or child-rearing may internalize more egalitarian norms.

Work–life balance outcomes emerge from the interaction of attitudes, behaviors, and structural conditions. A couple may profess egalitarian beliefs, but if workplaces are inflexible and childcare hard to find, they might still fall into a traditional pattern simply out of necessity – with the mother reducing work hours to manage home duties. Policies and social context (the "macro" level) thus play a crucial role. The recent Moldovan policies (Section 5) can be seen as attempts to shift structural conditions in favor of gender equality, enabling fathers to take parental leave, creating alternatives to the family-based childcare model, and improving financial support for maternity. Our conceptual framework therefore also draws on a life-course and policy perspective: gender dynamics are not static; they evolve with life stages and respond to policy incentives or economic pressures.

In summary, the framework guiding this report views gender inequality and work–life balance as outcomes of both deeply held attitudes and day-to-day practices in Moldovan households, all taking place within a broader socio-economic context. We will now turn to the data and methods used to investigate these elements, before presenting the empirical findings in detail.

3. Data and Methods

This analysis uses data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) in the Republic of Moldova, a nationally representative longitudinal survey of individuals aged 15–79 that focuses on family dynamics, gender relations, and demographic behavior. Wave 1 was conducted in late 2020 (with 10,074 respondents), and Wave 2 in late 2024 and early 2025, re-interviewing 5,599 of the original participants (55.6% retention). The GGS is well-suited for our purposes as it contains extensive information on gender role attitudes, division of household labor, childcare responsibilities, employment, and work–family reconciliation, in addition to key demographic and socio-economic characteristics. All analyses employ survey weights so that results are representative of Moldova's population in the respective wave. We constructed several measures from the GGS data for this report

Gender Attitudes

Gender attitudes are measured using a set of Likert-scale questions on gender roles and specifically whether specific roles and opportunities are more suited to men, to women or both sexes equally. We recoded these variables as dichotomous, delineating between those who thought it was of equal relevance to both sexes or whether one of the sexes was preferred. We examine these variables independently and then take the proportion of categories for which they said that it applied to both sexes equally as an aggregate of the general attitude towards gender equality.

Division of Household Tasks

Each respondent with a partner was asked who does various chores: preparing daily meals, cleaning/vacuuming, doing laundry, and small repairs, with response options ranging from "always me" to "always my partner" or someone else. We analyze these to determine the proportion of households where the woman is the main doer, the man is the main doer, or tasks are shared about equally. We do this separately for Wave 1 and Wave 2 to see what changes occur. In addition, we examine whether differences between waves are associated with transitions to parenthood and marriage.

Work–Life Balance Indicators

In Wave 2, respondents were asked if in the past 12 months they experienced certain difficulties: "I have come home from work too tired to do household chores that needed to be done" and "It has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job." We define a binary indicator for each, marking those who felt these difficulties at least several times a month (as opposed to rarely or never). Likewise, to gauge family-to-work interference, respondents were asked if they arrived at work exhausted due to housework or had trouble concentrating at work because of family responsibilities. These contextualize the extent to which structural support for work–life balance exists. We then examine whether these vary by gender, educational status and employment.

Contextual factors

The analysis also integrates contextual information from policy documents and other studies. For instance, when interpreting why certain changes (or lack thereof) occurred between 2020 and 2024, we consider external events: the COVID-19 lockdowns (which might have temporarily forced some men to do more housework while at home, or conversely increased women's burden with children out of school) and the new family policies enacted in 2022. We also compare Moldova's situation with international norms using external data – such as Eurostat or UNDP surveys on gender norms – to highlight where Moldova stands relative to other countries in the region or globally. All such references are cited accordingly.

By combining the strengths of the GGS panel data with supporting evidence, our methodology allows a comprehensive look at both attitudinal change and behavioral outcomes. In the following sections, we first present descriptive findings (Section 4) on attitudes, domestic labor division, and work–life balance, enriched with figures from the data. Finally, we delve into policy implications (Section 5) and conclude with recommendations (Section 6).

4. Key Findings

Gender Attitudes

Existing research has examined the degree to which Moldova is comparable to other countries with regards to gender attitudes. Here, we examine the extent to which there are differences within Moldova. To examine this we look at the extent to which individuals believe that specific roles and opportunities are suited equally to both men and women.

Figure 1 shows the results of this question by gender and reveals the overall pattern of responses. As per the report, there is relatively high gender equality in attitudes with regards to the importance of education and employment that is comparable to other European countries. Similarly, whilst lower, the proportion of respondents who consider men and women to be equally suited to politics is high relative to countries at similar stages of development. It is also notable that 68% of individuals believe that it is equally important for men and women to be involved in looking after children. Notably, this is even slightly higher for men themselves. However, when it comes to who is best suited to caring for family members, gender equal attitudes are far more scarce and only 24% of both men and women believe that both sexes are equally suited to these tasks, with the vast majority suggesting that women are better suited.

What is notable from these results however is the accordance in this pattern across men and women. They only deviate from each other by a few percentage points which are statistically insignificant. To further examine the degree to which this observation held across other cleavages in society, we also looked at the degree to which these varied across birth cohorts, urban and rural populations, and across educational groups. Figure 2 and 3 illustrate that these attitudes are remarkably consistent across these groups. There are slight variations but the same pattern emerges across all items.

This consistency is indicative of a settled and consistent view on gender roles within Moldova. This is not an issue on which we see systematic differences in perspectives between groups and disagreement about the role of women within society. Gender equality in public roles and access to employment and education opportunities is consistently high and there is at least a high degree of value placed on the role of both sexes in raising children. However, there remains a strong and consistent perception that

women are better at caring for children than men. This is quite low compared to many other countries in the GGS. For example, in Croatia 46% of people considered men and women to be equally suited to looking after small children.

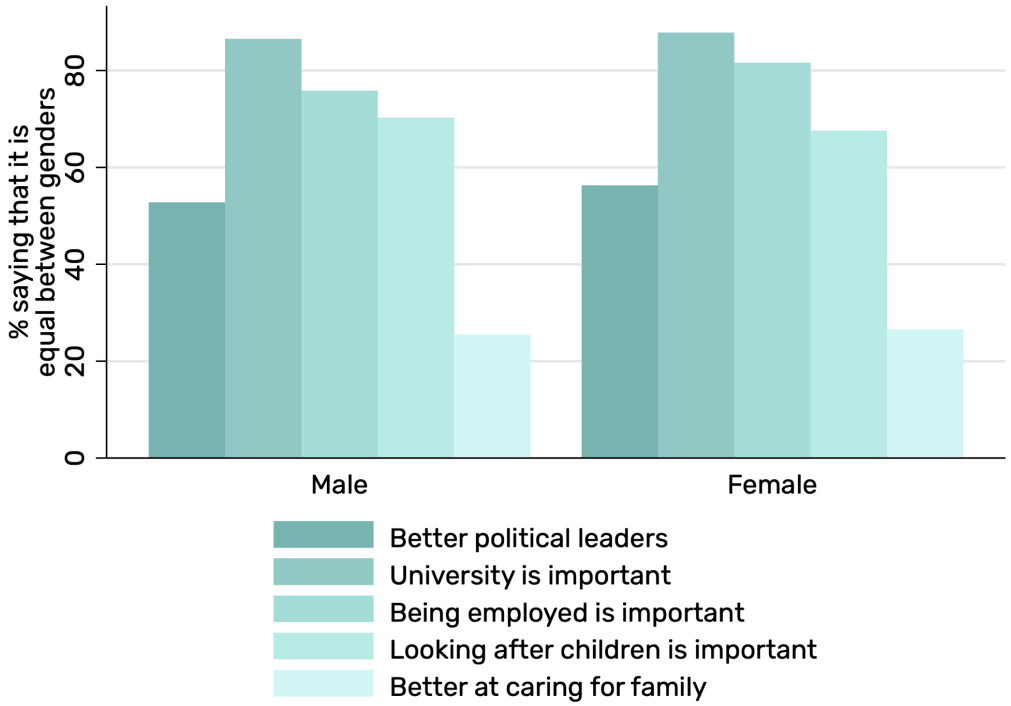

Figure 1 - Attitudes to Gender Equality by Gender (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

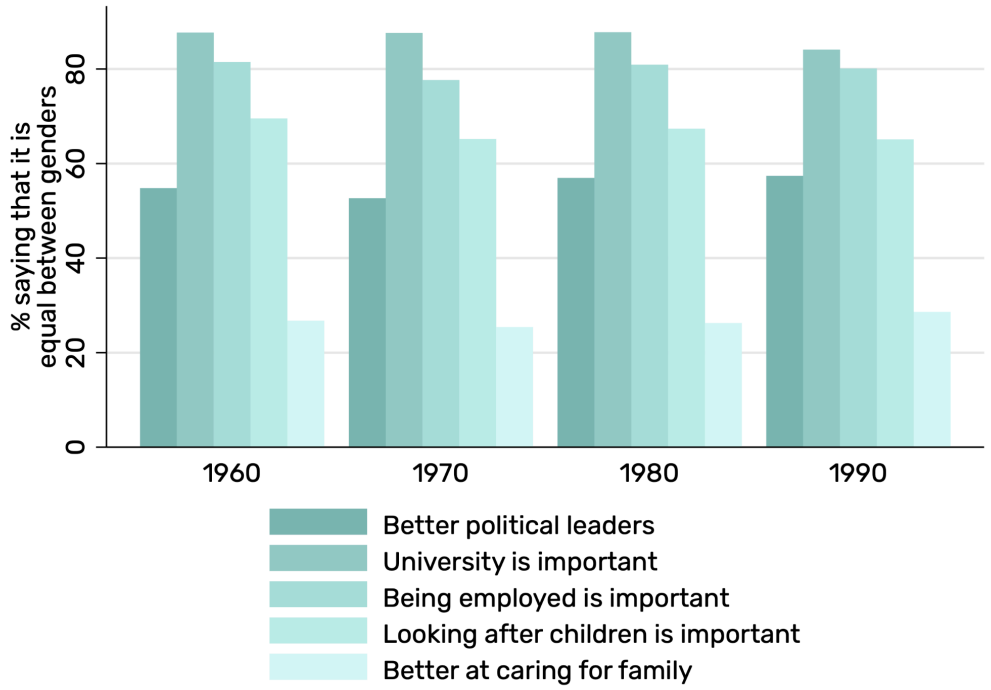

Figure 2 - Attitudes to Gender Equality by Birth Cohort (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

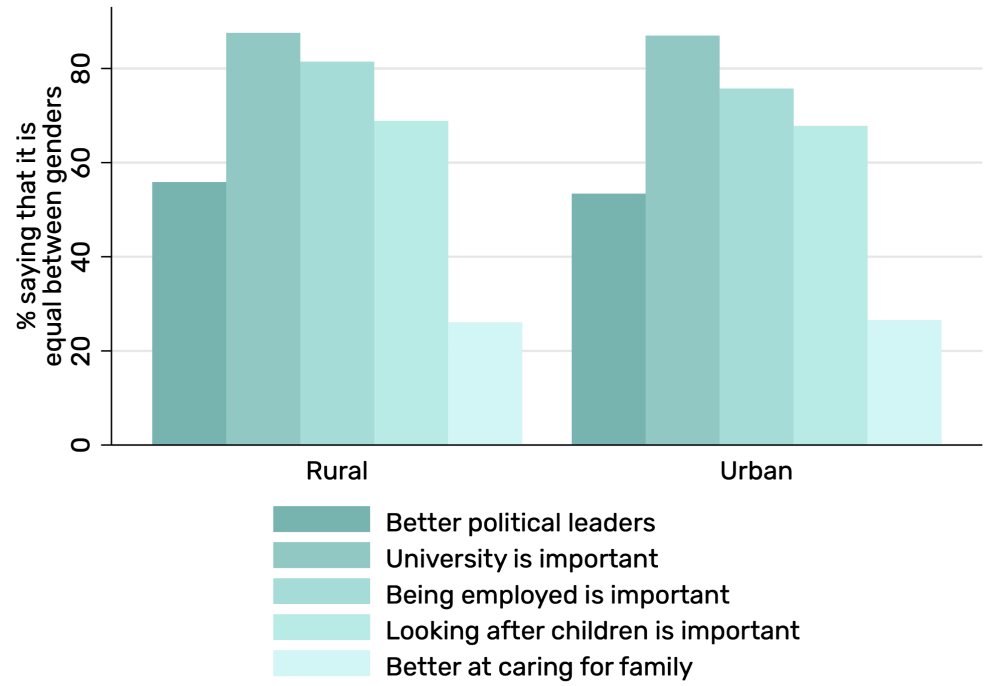

Figure 3 - Attitudes to Gender Equality in Urban and Rural areas (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

Division of Household Tasks

To examine the distribution of household tasks we looked at four items related to four specific tasks: Preparing meals, vacuuming, doing laundry, and small repairs. Respondents are asked whether these tasks are done always or mostly by themselves or the partner or whether the tasks are split equally. The results for each item by gender and by wave are provided in table 1.

The results show a very large gender divide in tasks. For example, 82% of women in wave 1 reported that they always or mostly were responsible for preparing meals. The reporting by men themselves is only very slightly more favourable with around 6% saying that they always or mostly prepared meals compared to 1% as reported by women. A similar pattern is also observed for vacuuming and doing laundry. Other countries which have fielded the GGS report similar gender imbalance in such tasks but Moldova is particularly gender unequal in this regard. One additional finding is that the discrepancy in reporting in Moldova is notably higher than elsewhere. For example, in Moldova 31% of men claimed that vacuuming was equally shared between themselves and their partner but only 18% of women agreed.

Small repairs is normally one task in which men are seen to dominate and this is true in Moldova for both waves, but the differences are not as large as for the other tasks. Small repairs are instead the task which are considered to be most evenly split between men and women. However, as before the discrepancy between genders on this is considerable. 44% of women in wave 1 reported that this task was split equally but only 36% of men reported it as such.

These results suggest there are clear gender divides in task allocation across couples in Moldova. However, it also suggests significant gender differences in how such workloads and tasks are perceived. With the data to hand, it is not possible to assess which perception is more accurate but it is possible that much of the labour within a household goes unseen or unacknowledged.

Across all tasks there is no consistent pattern between waves, suggesting that task distributions have been consistent across the time period.

Table 1 - Division of Household Tasks (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

Wave	Task	Gender	Always me	Usually me	Equally me and partner	Usually partner	Always partner	Always or usually someone else
1	Preparing Meals	Women	53.98	28.09	15.12	0.55	0.55	1.7
1	Vacuuming	Women	51.15	27.25	18.1	1	0.35	2.15
1	Doing Laundry	Women	59.65	27.75	9.6	0.8	0.55	1.65
1	Small Repairs	Women	7.17	4.66	44.83	24.07	14.44	4.81
1	Preparing Meals	Men	3.08	3.33	25.44	35.41	31.42	1.33
1	Vacuuming	Men	3	3	31.03	31.45	30.12	1.41
1	Doing Laundry	Men	3.08	3.41	16.21	38.07	37.91	1.33
1	Small Repairs	Men	33.25	21.78	36.66	2.41	2.83	3.08
2	Preparing Meals	Women	52.04	24.65	19.59	0.78	1.09	1.86
2	Vacuuming	Women	50.73	22.25	22.72	1.09	1.19	2.02
2	Doing Laundry	Women	59.13	26.21	9.96	1.08	1.39	2.22
2	Small Repairs	Women	4.37	4.63	34.77	24.23	26.13	5.86
2	Preparing Meals	Men	3.56	2.59	23.48	37.09	32.06	1.21
2	Vacuuming	Men	3.51	2.78	28.19	31.29	31.78	2.45
2	Doing Laundry	Men	3.82	2.6	14.47	37.48	40	1.63
2	Small Repairs	Men	38.51	21.04	30.42	2.35	3.32	4.37

To observe changes in the distribution of tasks, we restructured these variables to examine whether the tasks were always or mostly conducted by the woman in the relationship (for this analysis we looked exclusively at heterosexual couples). Figure 4 shows the results of this reconstruction and shows that the modal proportion of tasks done by women within a couple is about 0.75 or 75% of tasks. For 68% of couples in the sample, women are always or mostly doing at least 75% of the tasks.

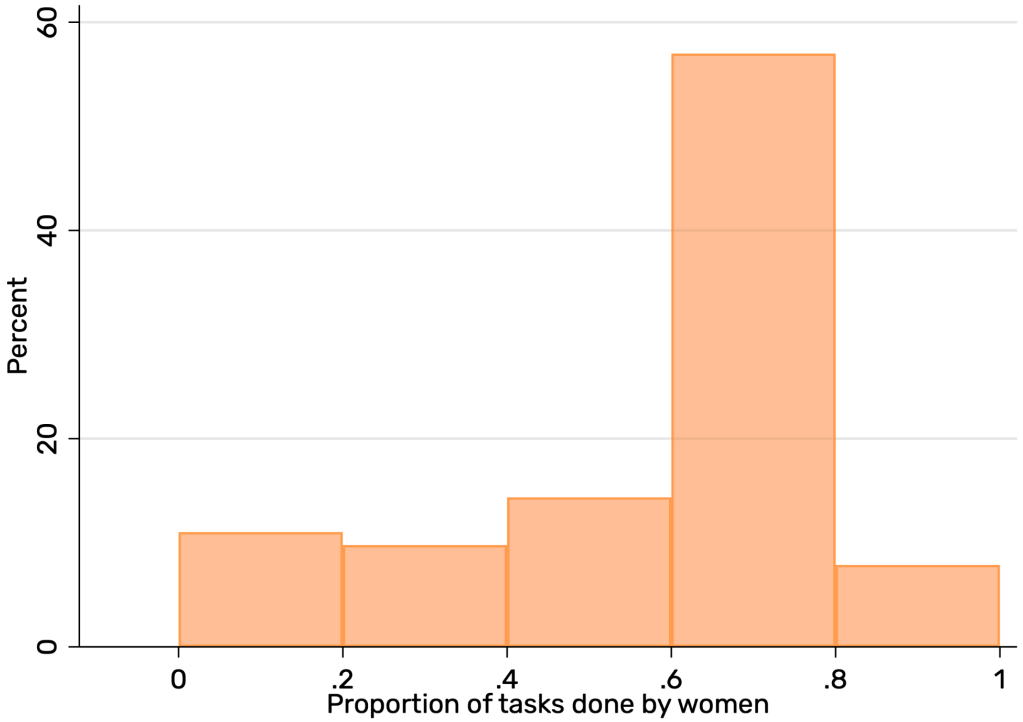

Figure 4 - Distribution of household tasks at Wave 1 (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

Whilst the distribution of household tasks is heavily skewed towards women, it is important to understand how this is related to child rearing and the transition to parenthood. To assess this, we first compared the distribution across all tasks for couples who had children under the age of five in the household and those who didn't. Couples with children under the age of five in the household are considered to be those under the greatest constraint regarding work life balance and the distribution of tasks so it would be expected that that the distribution of tasks would be particularly skewed towards women during this period. Figure 5 shows that there is negligible difference between the distribution of household tasks between these households. This is surprising as we commonly see an increase in gender inequality when a couple becomes a parent.

We tested this further by looking at couples distribution of household tasks in wave 1 and wave 2 and calculating the average shift in the distribution of household tasks. The results can be seen in figure 6 and they largely support the assertion that changes in the distribution of household tasks upon entering parenthood are gender neutral in Moldova. This finding underlines that household task distribution in Moldova is highly gendered prior to becoming parents and that Moldovan women experience the double shift even before becoming mothers. This might suggest that, irrespective of policy and institutional change, behaviour within couples is currently not supportive of gender equality and maternal employment.

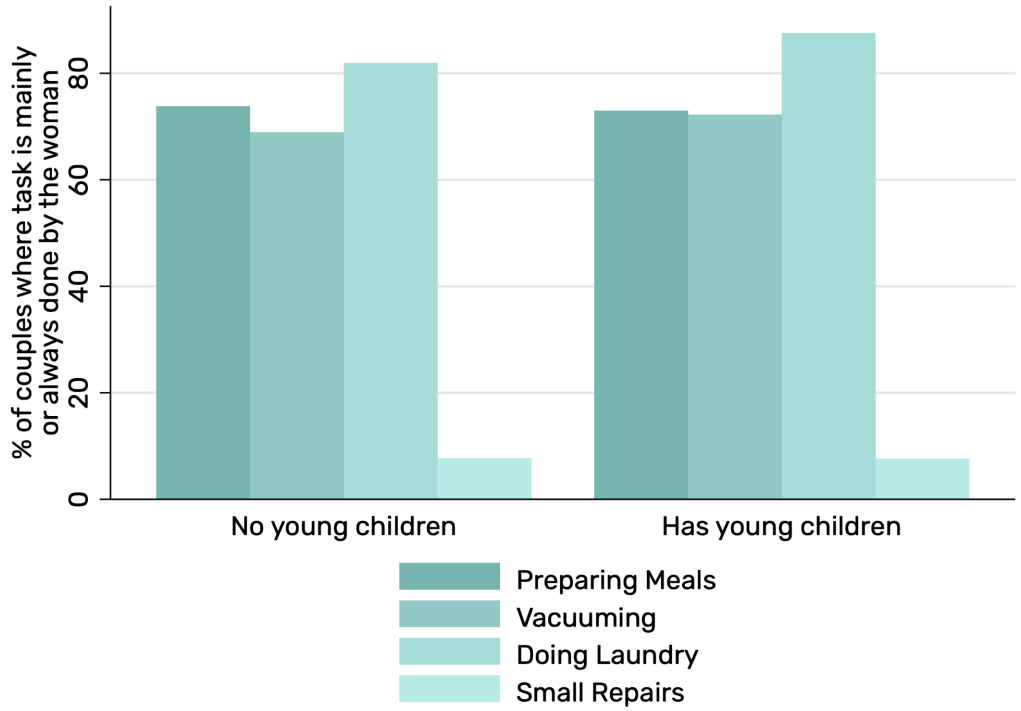

Figure 5 - Distribution of household tasks for those with and without children under the age of 5 in the household (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

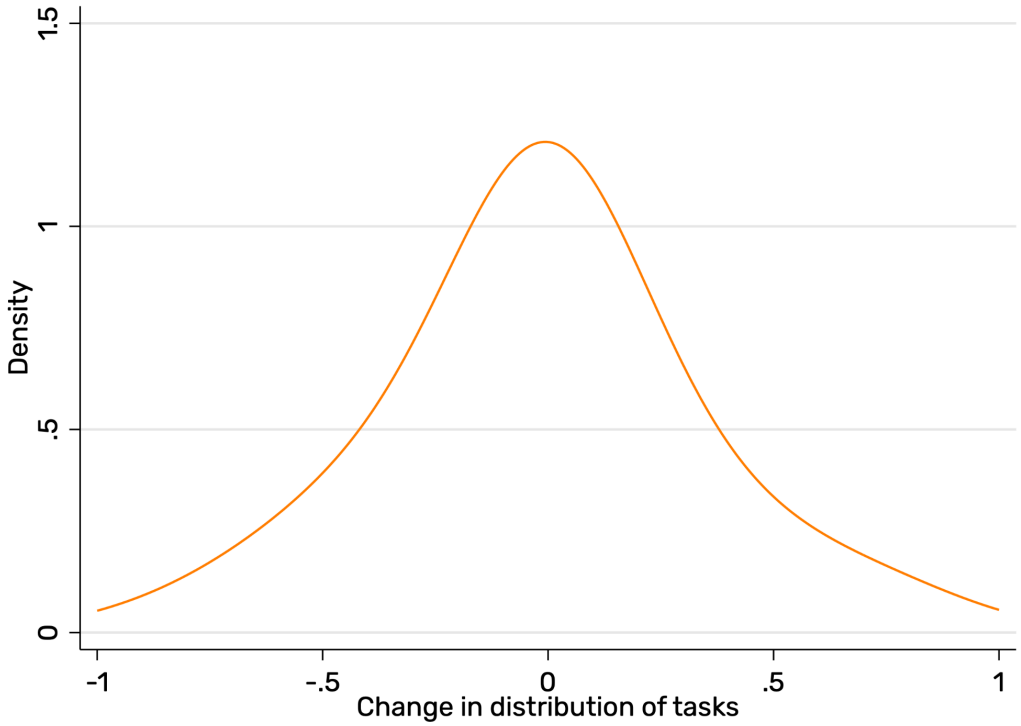

Figure 6 - Change in the Distribution of household tasks between Waves for those who became parents (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

Work Life Balance

To assess work life balance we examine the work life balance indicators included in the GGS. These indicators simply reflect whether respondents report frequently finding it hard or tiring to fufil elements of their work or home resposibilities. For these indicators, figure 7 shows that women report more frequent issues on all indicators when compared to men, though the differences are slight. Across the genders, the ordering of the frequency is consistent, with both men and women reporting it to be more common to have challenges in completing home tasks than work tasks.

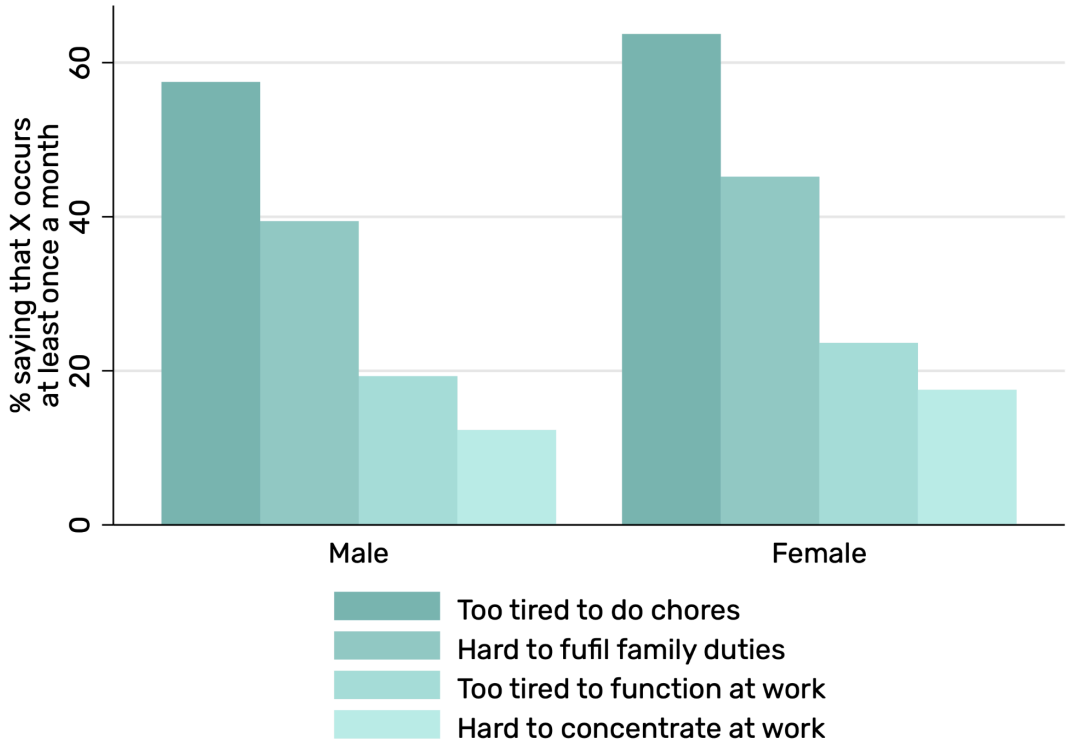

Figure 7 - Work Life Balance Indicators by gender (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

We then examine the degree to which these patterns of work life balance are consistent across education levels. Education level is often indicative of the type of work individuals do. Those with a higher education are more likely to work in the managerial and office based occupations. Those with lower education are commonly employed in manual work and in service delivery positions which are more physically demanding and include more irregular hours. For men, the differences in educational level are negligible (results not shown), with a consistent pattern as above. However, for women there are significant and informative differences. Figure 8 shows that amongst women, the ability to balance work tasks improves with educational level. This suggests that work becomes more amenable and easier to combine with home tasks. For women with a high education level, their work indicators are comparable with those of men.

By contrast, higher educated women find it harder to complete household duties than those with a lower education. This is likely because occupations that require a higher education are harder to combine with responsibilities at home. Higher education opens up opportunities in sectors that require significant commitment and prioritization over and above home responsibilities, including managerial and senior positions. This aligns with the overall gender attitudes and household task distribution

results we have observed. Women are seen as equally capable and worthy of educational and employment opportunities but this does not negate a strong gender division of responsibilities at home. This ensures that women who do pursue an education and career, there are opportunities but it is still necessary to complete responsibilities at home that are well above those required of their male counterparts.

Together these results suggest that in the context of prevalent theories of gender equality, the primary obstacles to improved gender equality and work life balance in Moldova is not institutional but is cultural at the micro-level. To enable alignment between macro and micro policies, there would have to be a significant cultural shift in the involvement of men within the execution of household duties and a broader social reevaluation of men's role within the household and family.

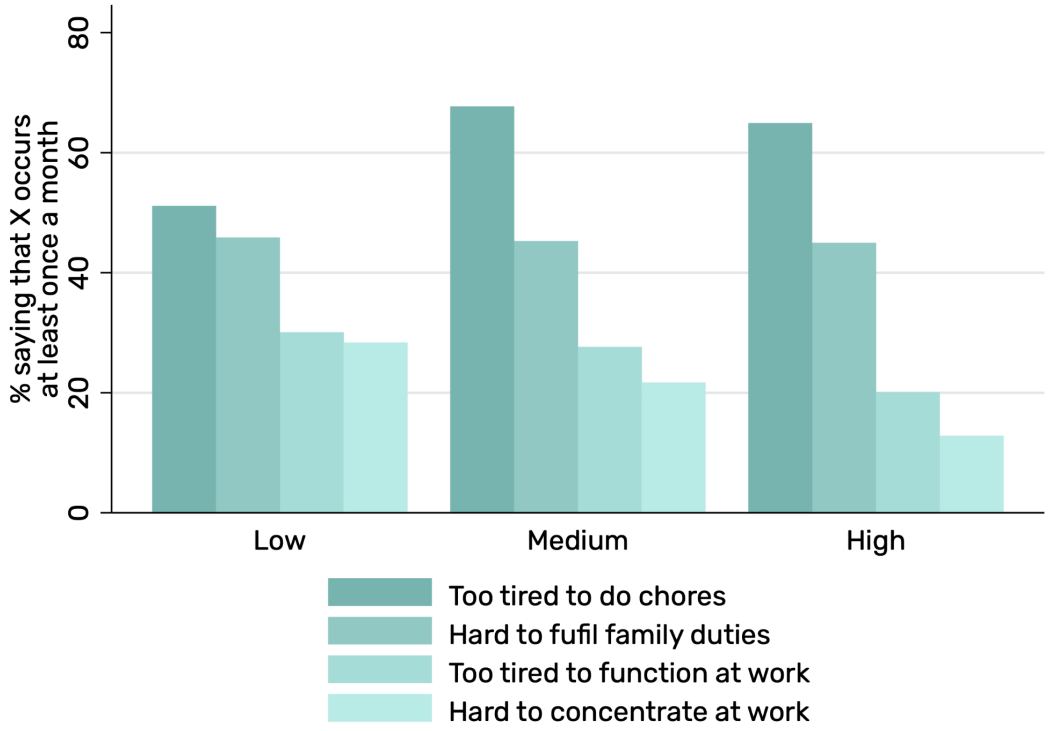

Figure 8 - Work Life Balance Indicators for women by education level (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

Finally, we examined the satisfaction with the distribution of household tasks. The vast majority of couples express satisfaction with the the distribution of household tasks. Men averaged a score of 9.14 out of 10 and women had a score of 8.57. This may seem small, but in a highly right skewed distribution, this suggests a significant and sizeable difference in satisfaction between genders. We were also interested in the shift in satisfaction over time, and especially in the transition to parenthood. Here, as with the actual distribution of tasks, we see little difference in satisfaction levels between before and after the transition to parenthood with an average firmly around 0 and very low kurtosis suggesting low variation.

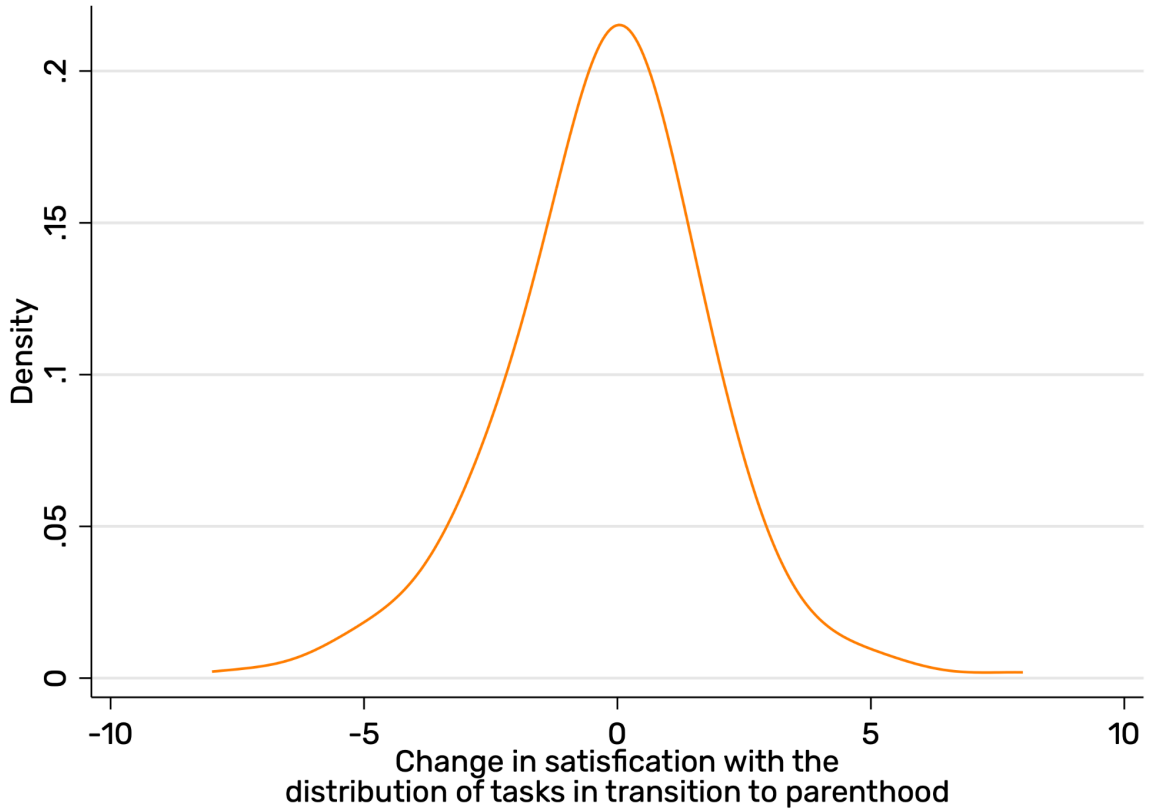

Figure 9 - Changes in the satisfaction with the distribution of household tasks in the transition to parenthood (Source: GGSII - Moldova)

5. Policy Implications

The Moldovan government has recently implemented a set of progressive family policy reforms in 2022 aimed at redistributing caregiving responsibilities and easing work–family tensions. These reforms directly target the structural barriers identified in our analysis – from rigid leave arrangements that put the onus on mothers, to the scarcity of childcare services and the financial penalties associated with motherhood. The key measures include:

Parental Leave Reform (Law No. 195/2022)

This law overhauls parental leave to encourage shared childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers. It introduced flexible leave duration options with higher income replacement rates for shorter leaves, creating incentives for parents to split leave rather than defaulting it entirely to mothers. Crucially, Law 195/2022 makes it possible to share parental leave between parents, as long as they take it sequentially (not overlapping). The intent is to normalize fathers taking time off to care for infants, thus reducing the "career cost" traditionally borne by mothers. By boosting fathers' uptake of leave, this reform seeks to chip away at the norm that childcare is solely a mother's duty. In the long run, broader father participation in parental leave can diminish employer discrimination against young women (employers will see men also taking leave) and support women's career continuity. It is a bold step toward leveling the playing field at home and at work. Early signs are encouraging but mixed – despite the new opportunity to share leave, parental leave continues to be predominantly taken by women (over 17,000 mothers versus 5,800 fathers were on leave as of early 2024). This indicates that

cultural norms and economic considerations still influence uptake, and further efforts are needed to ensure fathers fully embrace their leave rights.

Alternative Childcare Services (Law No. 367/2022)

This law establishes a legal framework to expand and diversify childcare options for children under three years of age. Until recently, formal care for infants and toddlers was extremely limited – in 2021–22, only about 10% of children under 2 were enrolled in any kind of nursery or formal preschool. The shortage of affordable childcare has forced many families to rely on mothers or informal caregivers at home, curtailing women's ability to return to work. Law 367/2022 addresses this gap by recognizing and regulating new forms of early childcare provision. It introduces employer-organized childcare (workplace crèches), home-based family nurseries run by certified providers for small groups of children, and individual licensed nannies. By formalizing and supporting these alternatives, the law aims to increase the availability of childcare slots and give parents more choices beyond the limited public nurseries. The government has complemented the law with incentives – offering grants and co-financing for companies that set up on-site childcare and launching a business accelerator for home-based childcare providers. If effectively implemented, these measures will relieve the caregiving burden on parents (especially mothers), allowing them to better reconcile work and family roles. Expanded childcare services directly enable better work–life balance, as parents (particularly women) can entrust children to safe care and pursue employment or education. However, the impact of Law 367 will depend on uptake and quality. Early challenges include some hesitation among employers (unsure of costs and responsibilities) and among informal nannies (reluctant to register formally given low wages in the sector). Affordability for families is also a concern if many new services remain private. Continuous monitoring and support will be required to ensure that increased childcare provision truly translates into greater access and doesn't leave low-income families behind.

Improved Maternity Benefits (Law No. 353/2022)

This reform enhances the financial and flexibility aspects of maternity leave. Firstly, it changes how maternity leave payments are calculated: instead of being tied solely to the mother's prior earnings, the benefit can now be based on the higher salary of either parent. This is a significant improvement for families in which the mother earned less than the father. By using the higher parental income, the policy raises the income replacement during leave, cushioning the household against financial loss when the mother (or either parent taking leave) is not working. It effectively ensures that having a child does not force the family to live on only a fraction of their usual income, which is particularly important for middle- and low-income households. Secondly, Law 353/2022 allows parents on childcare leave to work part-time while still receiving partial leave benefits (a practice that was previously restricted). This flexibility enables mothers or fathers to stay connected to their workplace – for example, by working a few hours a week or from home – without losing their leave entitlement. Such arrangements help prevent skill atrophy and career stagnation, and ease the re-entry into full-time work. Overall, the improved maternity and parental benefits under Law 353 aim to reduce the opportunity costs of childbearing and encourage a more equitable sharing of earning and caring responsibilities. They send a clear message that both parents are valued in their roles as caregivers and as workers. Going forward, it will be important to inform parents of these options and ensure employers accommodate part-time returnees, so that the policy's potential is fully realized.

Together, these three laws form a significant package to support gender-equal work–life balance in Moldova. They directly address the key hurdles identified in this study: rigid gender norms and lack of support that trap women in an "either/or" choice between career and family. By encouraging paternal involvement (Law 195), expanding childcare (Law 367), and mitigating the financial hit of motherhood (Law 353), the reforms tackle the root causes of inequality at home.

These measures also align with international best practices and Moldova's commitments to gender equality. If effectively implemented, they are expected to yield multiple payoffs easing the stress on families, improving women's labor market outcomes, and even making it more feasible for couples to realize their desired number of children. At the same time, policy-makers should be mindful that legal reforms alone cannot instantly change deeply entrenched social norms. As noted, fathers' uptake of leave and involvement in caregiving, while improving, remains relatively low in practice

Many mothers still feel obliged by tradition or circumstances to take on the majority of childcare. To maximize the impact of these laws, complementary efforts are needed from public education campaigns on co-parenting, to employer incentives and protections that encourage men to utilize family leave without stigma. Continuous evaluation is also important: tracking how many parents, of each gender, use the new leave options, how many workplace crèches or home nurseries get established, and whether families find the enhanced benefits sufficient. The policies of 2022 have laid a foundation for more gender-equal work–life balance; the next step is ensuring robust implementation and cultural acceptance so that these promising reforms truly take root in everyday life.

6. Conclusion

The Generations and Gender Survey data from Moldova provide a clear and nuanced message: while the principles of gender equality are widely accepted at a surface level, the lived reality between 2020 and 2024 was that women continue to carry a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labor and face greater challenges in balancing work and family life. This enduring imbalance and the "gendered double burden" acts as a drag on women's opportunities, men's full integration into family life, and couples' overall well-being.

Attitudes toward gender roles changed little over the three-year period, remaining a mix of moderate egalitarianism tempered by strong traditional streaks, especially regarding motherhood and childcare. Younger generations do not show any noticeable difference from older cohorts, suggesting that this issue will persist in the coming years. In practice, household roles in 2024 looked much as they did in 2020: women performed the majority of daily housework and caregiving tasks, with men's contributions relatively limited, aside from specific domains like repairs.

Surprisingly, the arrival of children doesn't intensify these inequalities, likely reflecting that the distribution of tasks is already as skewed as it will be prior to parenthood. Many women struggled with fatigue and role overload as they tried to fulfill duties at home and at work, far more so than men and particularly amongst those with higher education levels. It is telling that while the vast majority of couples report being satisfied with their arrangements, women's dissatisfaction rates are roughly double those of men's, signaling that a silent majority of women feel the strain and inequity even if it is normalized.

These dynamics do not exist in a vacuum; they are embedded in Moldova's socio-economic context. The early 2020s tested families with pandemic disruptions and economic uncertainties, which likely

reinforced some traditional patterns out of necessity – yet they also showcased the adaptability of families and the importance of supportive policies. It is encouraging that the Moldovan government, aligning with UNFPA and international best practices, proactively introduced family policy reforms to create a more enabling environment for gender equality at home. The challenge now is implementation and cultural uptake. Going forward, several recommendations emerge from this analysis:

Promote and Track Father's Engagement

Ensure that new provisions for paternity and shared parental leave are widely publicized and utilized. Set targets for father uptake and monitor progress. Celebrate early adopters (for example, profiling fathers who took leave or are heavily involved at home) to combat stigma.

Expand Childcare and After-School Programs

Accelerate the development of childcare centers for under-3s as envisioned by Law 367. Simultaneously, improve access to preschool (3–6) and ensure after-school care or clubs for school-age children. This directly relieves families – especially mothers – and also creates jobs (often for women, in childcare sector). It's a win-win investment.

Flexible Work Culture

Encourage both public and private employers to implement flexible work arrangements not just as a favor, but as a standard option. Where feasible, promote telecommuting, adjustable hours, and output-based (rather than time-based) performance evaluation. Train managers to manage flexible teams and dispel the notion that only women use flexibility; encourage men to utilize it too (e.g., a father leaving early to pick up a child should be as accepted as a mother doing so).

Education and Curriculum

Integrate concepts of gender equality and sharing responsibilities into school education (e.g., civics or life skills classes). Teach boys and girls from early on that cooking, cleaning, and caring are basic life skills, not gender-specific tasks. Some schools might even implement "family life" simulations or assignments where students practice these skills equally.

Ongoing Data Collection

Continue to collect data through surveys like GGS to measure progress. What gets measured gets managed. If, say, by the next survey we see an increase in the proportion of men doing daily chores or an uptick in women's satisfaction with task-sharing, that will validate efforts; if not, strategies may need recalibration.

MINISTERUL MUNCII
ȘI PROTECȚIEI SOCIALE
AL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA

UNFPA

India-UN Development
Partnership Fund

Elveția.

nidi
netherlands
interdisciplinary
demographic
institute