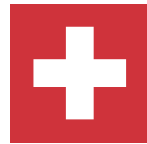




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Women for
Peace & Prosperity

Photo: Nicolae BAHCIANJI, ILO Moldova



Building Partnerships to Expand Childcare Services

The ILO experience
in Ungheni Municipality



It has been and continues to be very important to meet this need for young families. Parents truly want to return to work. The services we offer here are of high quality and they allow to bring their little ones to childcare from the age of one.

► **Vitalie VRABIE,**
Mayor of Ungheni

For many families in Moldova, especially those with children under the age of three, limited access to affordable and reliable childcare can be a major barrier to employment. Parents, and mothers in particular, often face difficulties combining care responsibilities with participation in the labour market.

In Ungheni Municipality, this challenge became an opportunity for innovation. Through a strong partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ungheni Municipality, workers and employers organizations, civil society and local institutions, new childcare solutions are helping families balance work and family life while creating new economic opportunities for women.

Today, Ungheni, a municipality of 26,457 people located in the western-central part of the Republic of Moldova, close to the border with Romania, is demonstrating how local partnerships can create practical solutions that improve lives and offer lessons for other municipalities across Moldova. Building on an assessment of childcare needs and existing provision, the partners have worked to expand different forms of childcare, while also supporting women's employment and entrepreneurship in the care sector.

Why change was needed

Responding to the shortage of affordable, reliable and flexible childcare for children under three requires solutions that reflect local needs and circumstances. The needs of families differ across municipalities, as do existing services, local resources and opportunities for developing new forms of childcare. Moldova therefore needed a planning approach that could be applied consistently across different cities while allowing the resulting solutions to reflect these differences.

Recognising this need, the ILO launched an initiative, supported by the Swiss Government, across six growth-pole municipalities: Ungheni, Cahul, Comrat, Orhei, Soroca and Edineț. Ungheni became the first municipality to pilot this approach.

A partnership built around local solutions

The collaboration was formalised through a [Memorandum of Understanding between the ILO and Ungheni Municipality](#), aiming at improving the coverage and accessibility of childcare services for the local community, while strengthening the capacity of local authorities to respond effectively to childcare needs. The partnership supports implementation of the Moldova National Programme on Childcare Services for Children up to Three Years (2023–2026).

Designing childcare based on evidence

The ILO supported a [Comprehensive Mapping and needs assessment of childcare demand and supply in Ungheni](#), alongside the development of a [Roadmap](#) outlining context-specific childcare service provision models.

A consistent finding across municipalities was that childcare for children under three cannot rely on a single service format. Local authorities need a mix of options: public nursery expansion, home-based nurseries, employer-supported childcare, flexible or part-time services and extended-hours care.

Photo: Veronica GîRBU, ILO Moldova



▀ ▀ This initiative supports women in developing their skills, pursuing their aspirations, and building sustainable businesses in the field of alternative childcare services.

- ▶ **Carolina BUGAIAN,**
President of the Association
of Women Entrepreneurs of
Moldova (AFAM)



Photo: Denis RUSU, ILO Moldova

Home-based nurseries: A new model combining childcare solutions with women's entrepreneurship

- ▶ **30 women from Ungheni strengthened their entrepreneurial skills** through specialised training in entrepreneurship, business management, and soft skills, gaining the competencies needed to start, operate, and grow sustainable early childhood care and education (ECCE) businesses.
- ▶ **15 women completed professional childcare training in partnership** with Alexei Mateevici College, developing practical skills in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
- ▶ **12 women entrepreneurs received grants of MDL 40,000** each to establish family-type childcare services, supported by a comprehensive package combining business coaching and mentoring and regulatory guidance and facilitation;
- ▶ **10 women successfully launched home-based nurseries in Ungheni**, creating new childcare opportunities for families while building sustainable sources of income and local entrepreneurship.

Building a community of women entrepreneurs in the care sector

The initiative supports the development of a peer-learning and support network among women providing home-based childcare services in Ungheni.

The success of the initiative has inspired women entrepreneurs to establish Moldova's first National Association of Family-Type Childcare Services, giving providers a collective voice and a means to collaborate and support the continued development of family-type childcare services in Moldova.

With these initiatives, we can now offer care to children from the earliest months of life. It is the first step toward ensuring that all children have equal opportunities for development.

► **Beneficiary, founder of the “Pui de Academicieni” family-type crèche**
Natalia SAJIN

Expanding public childcare

[Kindergarten No. 47 “Solnisko”](#) has opened its first dedicated nursery group for children under the age of three, creating 24 additional childcare places for families in the community.



Photo: Vadim HANCU, ILO Moldova

Supporting working parents

A [child-friendly space](#) for the children of Border Police employees was launched at the premises of the **Western Regional Directorate** in Ungheni. The initiative aims to support employees with family responsibilities and promote a better work-life balance.

The newly established child-friendly space provides a safe and welcoming environment for children, reflecting the partners' commitment to supporting working families. It responds to a concrete need: 490 Border Police employees engaged in protecting the state border are parents of 506 children under the age of 12. By creating this dedicated space, the initiative contributes to improving the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities for Border Police personnel.

▶▶ A parent's thoughts are always with their child. If you know they are just a few steps away, in a safe place, you can focus better on your work. This is not just about comfort—it's about efficiency, morale, and trust.

▶ **Sergiu BARBACARI**,
director of the Western
Regional Directorate of the
Border Police, President of the
"FRONTIERA" Trade Union

Helping mothers return to work after childcare leave

The partnership also piloted a specialised support service helping mothers reconnect with the labour market through tailored guidance and support. 217 mothers returning from parental leave were reached through an outreach campaign, while 45 mothers successfully re-entered the labour market after benefiting from training, skills development courses, and information sessions.

The Ungheni Employment Office officially opened a [child-friendly space](#) within its premises, providing a more supportive environment for mothers seeking employment opportunities while ensuring that their children have access to a safe and welcoming space.

More than services: building a childcare ecosystem

The Ungheni experience demonstrates how coordinated partnerships can create sustainable childcare systems that support decent work, gender equality and inclusive local development.

Photo: Vadim STIRBU, ILO Moldova



The initiative strengthened local leadership, women's entrepreneurship, employer engagement and evidence-based planning, providing a model that can be adapted and replicated across Moldova and beyond.

Partners

- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
- Municipality of Ungheni
- Border Police and "WEST" Regional Directorate
- National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM)
- SINDLEX Trade Union Federation
- FRONTIERA Trade Union
- Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Moldova (AFAM)
- Alexei Mateevici College
- Civitta
- National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM)



Photo: Denis RUSU, ILO Moldova

Projects involved in the activities in Ungheni

Project [*Promoting the creation of quality employment and sustainable enterprises in the care and related sectors in the Republic of Moldova*](#)

Project [*Enhancing peace and economic prosperity through women's leadership and inclusion in the Republic of Moldova*](#) funded by the Government of Switzerland

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