

# Mapping and Analysis of Peacebuilding Initiatives in Moldova

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**gnwp**

Global Network of  
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## INTRODUCTION

As part of the project "Local Communities Build and Support Peace: Strengthening the Participation of Women and Youth in Building Sustainable Peace in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kenya, Moldova, South Sudan, Uganda and Ukraine," the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), in partnership with Gender-Centru, and with the support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), has conducted an analysis of the actors and peacemaking initiatives in Moldova.

The purpose of this mapping of peacebuilding actors and initiatives in the Republic of Moldova is to gain a better understanding of the existing context on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), including organizations and activities, at the national and local levels in order to establish broader partnerships.

The mapping overviews actors and peace initiatives in the four regions of Moldova: Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia, Transnistria, Cahul and Ungheni. The review provided an opportunity to identify women's peace and security challenges in Moldova. It also shed light on women and women-led organizations' work to address some of these barriers, the solutions they propose to address community problems and the obstacles to carrying out their peacebuilding work.

The areas that have been explored in depth in the mapping of peacebuilding initiatives are:

- Barriers and opportunities for women's political participation and participation in peace processes;
- Barriers and opportunities for women's economic empowerment; and
- The impact of misuse of natural resources on women's security and participation.

The data included in this study were collected between January and April of 2021. Sociological research methods were applied to the data collection, including social surveys, questioning, and telephone interviews with adults aged 18 years and over. The questionnaire was provided in Romanian and Russian, allowing respondents to choose their preferred language of communication in the data collection process.

In total, the research reached 30 respondents, including government representatives and civil society members from Ungheni district, Cahul district, ATU Gagauzia and the Transnistria region.

# UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN MOLDOVA

Like other countries around the world, the Republic of Moldova has faced new security challenges since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been, and still is, an unprecedented global threat to social, economic and environmental security, as well as to national and international governance structures.

There are already multiple implications of the pandemic on implementing the WPS

agenda. Among these impacts, erroneous perceptions of women's roles in peace and conflict processes and stereotyped ideas of gender roles in the security and defense sector are maintained. Additionally, in times of crisis, gender equality is a goal that is often put on hold. Existing studies show that in conflict-affected areas, there is an increased risk of humanitarian crises, which often lead to greater isolation and higher levels of domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

## The correlation between female leadership and crisis management

Using statistical analysis of available data on the COVID-19 pandemic and an examination of basic human needs, inequalities and economic resilience, the study "Women in power: Female leadership and public health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic" found that:<sup>2</sup>

- Women-led countries overall have suffered six times fewer deaths due to COVID-19 than countries with men-led governments; and
- Women-led governments have been more efficient and faster in flattening the epidemic curve, with daily peak deaths about six times lower than in male-led countries.

### What are the main peace and security issues that local communities – especially local women – face?

Respondents provided a variety of answers to this question. Representatives of the Central Public Administration (CPA) specified that the problems of food security, health care, ecological stability and personal safety are the most pressing

security problems faced by the communities. Women, in particular, highlighted problems of social and personal security as the most important to them.

The answers of the respondents from the Local Public Administration (LPA), offered a more specific overview on the types of social and personal security faced by local women, namely:

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, GNWP database on Women, Peace and Security: <https://gnwp.org/resources/covid-19-wps-database/>

<sup>2</sup> Coscieme, Luca, et al. "Women in power: female leadership and public health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic." *MedRxiv* (2020), <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.13.20152397v2>

- Poverty and lack of jobs
- Lack of medication and reduced access to healthcare
- Domestic violence
- Ecological issues
- Emigration
- Consumption of alcohol and narcotics
- Addiction to digital technologies
- Aggravation of mental disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic

Respondents from civil society shared that the main peace and security issues facing local communities include:

- Poor functioning of state institutions and compliance with legislation
- High unemployment and the resulting economic vulnerability
- Domestic violence and violence against women
- Limited access to and low quality of medical services
- In the Transnistrian region, the problem of the frozen conflict, which causes stress and anxiety to the local population

All respondents believe that mismanagement or misuse of natural resources contributes to threats and feelings of insecurity, including by violating the protection of workers and the safety of the general population, as well as impeding the economic development of the Republic for both women and men. Some respondents

also mentioned the gendered differences in the types of labor women and men perform on natural resources. While over 70 per cent of Moldovan territory is agricultural land,<sup>3</sup> women control only 19 per cent of the land. The differences in natural resource management on these lands stem from the social behavior and traditional gender roles assigned to women and men. For example, respondents mentioned how cutting down trees and burning garbage is more often done by men. Women typically undertake less mechanized work than men, such as weeding, planting seeds and harvesting in greenhouses, among others.<sup>4</sup>

## EXISTING PEACEBUILDING AND SECURITY INITIATIVES

The mapping exercise asked respondents if they know of existing peacebuilding and security initiatives as well as the actors implementing those initiatives, such as government, civil society or other stakeholders.

### Women Are Underrepresented in Peace Processes

"Women's participation at the negotiating table, their connection to peacemaking activities through informal channels can create significantly broader perspectives in conflict resolution. The more opinions are taken into account in the decision-making process, the more efficiently the problems are solved."

-Anonymous respondent from the Transnistria region

<sup>3</sup> FAO. 2022. National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods – The Republic of Moldova. Country Gender Assessment Series – Europe and Central Asia. Budapest. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9555en>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Most CPA and LPA respondents mentioned that peace and security initiatives usually come from civil society and that most are led by women. Civil society significantly participates in building social partnerships and advocates for the creation of state partner organizations to create social policies.

Most civil society respondents also believed that initiatives addressing security issues were primarily led by civil society organizations, many of which are women-led. Most respondents expressed that women are actively involved in peace and security initiatives and that they are frequently initiators of peacebuilding action.

Eight respondents refrained from answering this question or answered that they were not aware of such initiatives.

The answers regarding the inclusion of the gender dimension in security initiatives differed significantly. Some participants believed that, despite women's participation and leadership, gender perspectives are not reflected in peace and security initiatives. Others argued that the initiatives "are well adapted, considering that we have Basque women in Gagauzia and the President of Moldova."

Most respondents, however, recognized that despite their contributions, women are not involved in the official negotiation process.

When discussing women's involvement in peacebuilding initiatives and official peace processes, the following challenges were identified:

- Most of the time, men do not care about the women's point of view, and official decisions are made by men.
- Security and peace initiatives do not include a gender dimension and thus, their impact on women is almost negligible. One of the respondents believed that there was no need to include a gender dimension in peacebuilding initiatives because they concerned the entire community, and not women specifically. This highlights the deeply rooted misconceptions about the importance of gender in peacebuilding.
- There is insufficient involvement of women in the economic life of the country.
- There is no support for women-led initiatives.

Examples of security initiatives coming from the State were also mentioned. These included support to vulnerable groups, for example by implementing programs to pay child benefits in the case of caregiver loss or benefits for children left without parental care, housing for orphans, granting loans to young families with low interest, or subsidies for paying utility bills to pensioners, people with disabilities and pensioners living separately or alone.

#### A Good Practice in Existing Peacemaking and Security Initiatives

The non-governmental organization (NGO) "Interaction" has set up a telephone hotline that provides assistance to people in difficult life situations and victims of domestic violence, providing advice and shelter to people in need of support.

## BARRIERS TO THE FULL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND THE SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES

The participation of women in peace and security processes is achieved by promoting a culture of peace at the national, local and institutional levels. According to data provided by relevant State institutions, the representation of women has increased in the security and defense sectors, but less so in decision-making positions.

In the new government, the major decision-making positions of the President and Prime Minister as well as the position of Minister of Internal Affairs are held by women. After the parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021, 40 per cent of seats in the Parliament were held by women.<sup>5</sup> These positive developments have increased society's expectations about the impacts of women's meaningful participation in decision-making.

The security institutions' initiative that developed procedures for conducting internal research on gender perceptions was mentioned by participants. For example, the Intelligence and Security Service approved the Gender Perception Assessment Questionnaire to understand how gender perceptions affect the work of the organization. The Ministry of Defense, through the project "Support for security sector reform in the Republic of Moldova," funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), included national experts

in a process of self-assessment of military leadership through the perspective of gender mainstreaming. The performance of the institution was assessed in relation to 23 indicators. This experience allowed them to integrate the same methodology into internal evaluation procedures.

Within the project "Balanced participation in decision-making," the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in partnership with UN Women Moldova and with the support of the Swedish Embassy, initiated the internal research procedure on gender equality and the working conditions of women in the police force. According to the Order of the Head of the General Inspectorate of Police no. 34 / 3-478 of 22 October 2018, between October and November 2018, the representatives of the police and the NGO "Gender-Centru" visited the territorial subdivisions to assess gender perceptions, increase the share of women in the total staff and strengthen their positive image in the workplace and in society.

Most respondents believed that women's involvement in peace processes was too low. Gender stereotypes, such as taking on household responsibilities and caring for children — mentioned by respondents in the ATU Gagauzia region — were identified as the main barriers to women's involvement

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<sup>5</sup> Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliaments (%) - moldova. The World Bank. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2021&locations=MD&start=2021&view=bar>



in the negotiation process. In addition to these barriers, respondents in the Transnistrian region pointed to lack of citizenship and age restrictions as other challenges preventing the full participation of women in political and economic life and in peace processes.

Other barriers mentioned by respondents include:

- The domination of men in official structures and processes;
- The systemic favoring of men (through electoral lists, economic predominance, possession of resources, etc.);
- A lack of leadership and negotiating experience among women; and
- Insufficient support for women-led and civil society initiatives.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

### Impacts on Peace Talks or Implementation of Peace Agreements

1. Peace agreements have been threatened by a lack of communication due to the pandemic. Personal contact during negotiations has been replaced by an online format that does not promote sincerity and objectivity.
2. Peace and security are affected. The population has great anxiety, and a lack of understanding of future development.
3. The pandemic froze, stopped or slowed down the search for peaceful solutions. Negotiations are slowly beginning to resume.
4. Practice shows that despite women's crucial role in times of acute crisis, concrete decisions are made mainly by men.

### Impacts on the Domestic Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions imposed by the Republic of Moldova had different economic and social impacts on women and men. These gendered impacts were influenced by social and familial gender roles, among other factors.

COVID-19 safety measures at the beginning of the pandemic worsened already present economic inequalities, especially for women with children. In 2019, women between the ages of 25 and 49 years old with children under 6 years old were 20 per cent less employed than women of the same age without children.<sup>6</sup> During the initial COVID-19 crisis, women often withdrew from the labor market to take on a disproportionate amount of care responsibilities as childcare services were closed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> UN Women. (2020). Socio-Economic Response and Recovery Plan. UN Women – Headquarters. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>

<sup>7</sup> UN Women. (2021). Childcare, Women's Employment And The Impact Of Covid-19: The Case Of Moldova. UN Women. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <https://moldova.unwomen.org/en>

The first form of withdrawal from the labor market was the move from working in person to at home, and 27 per cent of Moldovan women worked remotely during the emergency period.<sup>8</sup> Increased isolation at home with limited access to the outside world created a Shadow Pandemic, as the risk of domestic violence has spiked.<sup>9</sup> Forty-six per cent of Moldovan women have expressed fears about domestic violence.<sup>10</sup>

When asked about the greatest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's rights and security, respondents listed the following:

- Decreased income (for example, in the agricultural or handicraft industries), job loss, lack of confidence in the future, and anger and aggression in the community.
- Increased violence in the household and other manifestations of mental aggression against women and girls.
- Violation of citizens' rights and inactions in response, justified by the pandemic context.
- Fear of harsher quarantine conditions, traffic restrictions, insufficient medical care, and rising food and drug prices. There are concerns about the unpredictability caused by secondary consequences of the pandemic.
- Barriers to education, including the closure of kindergartens, and the reliance of schoolchildren on distance learning, which increased household chores for women.
- Decreased women's income, particularly due to restrictions, and a resulting increase in dependence on men.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> UN Women. (n.d.). The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19. UN Women. Retrieved December

When asked about the impact of the pandemic on women's participation in decision-making, the respondents did not believe it had an influence.

### Impacts on Service Delivery

The majority of LPA respondents, both from the Transnistrian region and from ATU Gagauzia, viewed the government's COVID-19 mitigation measures as ineffective, including periodic quarantines. Respondents mentioned that access to basic services was difficult and limited, and it was sometimes impossible to obtain medical advice or services, including reproductive health services.

The consequences of the prolonged pandemic situation, including the state support of the medical workers, were not taken into account in the 2021 budget, which meant that there was not adequate support to the most vulnerable. Those who fell sick were not offered paid sick leave and the particular needs of women were not taken into account.

Some respondents from Transnistria mentioned problems with documenting the population under restrictive pandemic conditions (issuing documents of newborn children, and completing the documents of returnees, especially children), due to mobility restrictions between both banks of the Dniester river (in the security field).

### Impacts on the Information Space

False news increased, especially concerning the spread of the virus and vaccinations against COVID-19.

20, 2022, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

<sup>10</sup> UN Women. (2021). Childcare, Women's Employment And The Impact Of Covid-19: The Case Of Moldova.

Opportunities to protect women's rights have diminished due to communication and mobility difficulties during the pandemic. Most respondents on the left bank of the Dniester confirmed pressure from the authorities against expressing dissatisfaction with government decisions made during the pandemic.

The main effects felt by respondents as representatives of civil society organizations are:

- The challenges of transferring to online ways of working, with changing working hours and methods;
- Taking on new roles, including delivering services to help the most vulnerable during the pandemic;
- Additional expenses linked to sanitizing the offices and ensuring proper hygiene measures during events;
- Postponing of many activities and events due to lockdown measures;
- Diversion of funding, financial difficulties and putting ongoing projects on hold; and
- Increased stress and burnout, due to the double or triple amount of effort required for carrying out the activities, and working with the beneficiaries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote women's participation in peace processes and policy-making:

- Employ different methods to change men's views on the potential of women in the defense sector, including awareness-raising and training, work with the media, communications campaigns, etc.;

- Raise awareness about the benefits of including women and a gender perspective in negotiation processes, such as strengthening the sustainability of their results or taking into account the different needs of the population;
- Increase the number of women in peacekeeping missions;
- Create communication platforms between the organizations on both banks of the Dniester including Gagauzia;
- Connect the work between the LPA from the security region and the NGO working within the WPS Agenda; and
- Involve women's organizations in the implementation of the National Action Plan on United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325.

To promote women's participation in the economy:

- Promote entrepreneurship and business development among women with access to credit, capital markets and finance;
- Improve women's financial competence through access to land and property rights;
- Provide better jobs for women and increase wages, working conditions and benefit systems;
- Support women through education and skills training;
- Provide financial support to women through pay parity and offering privileges in building business;
- Support programs for women's organizations and human rights activists in preventing emotional and professional burnout; and
- Create support groups for developing resilience in crisis situations.



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