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THE COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN THE WOMAN'S OCCUPATIONAL STATUS AND HER MATERNAL ROLE

Policy Brief

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The current demographic situation in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by negative trends, the main problem being the continuous decrease in the number of population and its demographic aging. Demographic research shows that the main cause of population decline is a sharp drop in the birth rate that occurred after 1990. In 2011 the Government of the Republic of Moldova approved the National Strategic Program on Demographic Security of the Republic of Moldova (2011-2025) aiming at mitigating the adverse trends in the evolution of population; promoting family and the encouragement of birth policies being referred to as primary.

We mention that most European countries that record low levels of birth since the 1960s over several decades promote policies to encourage birth rates. Experience in this area demonstrates the existence of three key points which improve fertility in contemporary society: promoting gender equality in all spheres of social life, creating favorable conditions for combining work and family roles and development of various extra family education services to children. In addition to these there are the durability and consistency of the measures taken¹.

In the Republic of Moldova, the demographic approaches increasingly draw attention to the issue of compatibility between the employment status of women and their maternal role. Who are more oriented to the birth of a baby: economically active or inactive women? Having a job, impedes or not the decision to have a baby? These issues and assumptions lie in different ex-

planations related both to woman reproductive orientations and the values ones, for the job and labor became components of the contemporary woman value nucleus and the fear of losing the additional source of income, during the maternity leave and birth of a baby place the woman before an important decision.

Official statistics allows a delimitation of the specific features of the economic behavior of women in fertile age. Thus, from the distribution of employment indicators in five-year age groups, we delimit that, in the dynamics of years, women have a higher share in the labor market especially after the age of 35 years old. Women's participation in economic activity is highest in age groups 40-44 and 45-49, comprising over 60% of women in that age group². The female employment rate is lower for marginal age groups (15-19/20-24 years old and after the age of 55) compared with the respective indicators among men. In the total of young women, one of five is economically active.

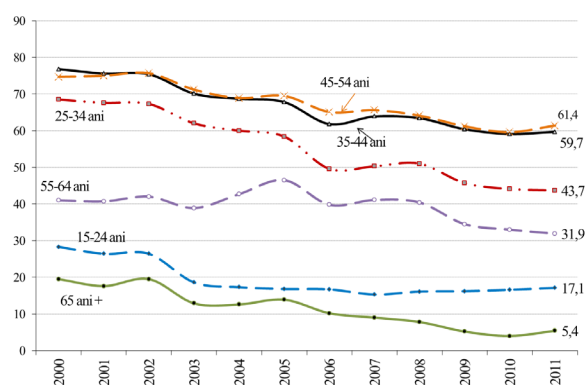


Fig. 1. The dynamics of the employment rate of women, by age, years 2000-2011 (in %)

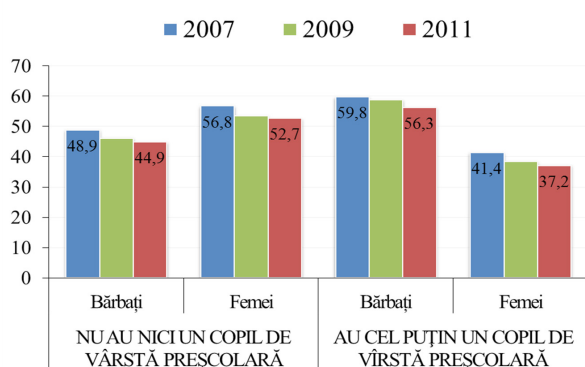
Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, <http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=320&id=2294>

1 McDonald P. An Assessment of Policies that Support Having Children from the Perspectives of Equity, Efficiency and Efficacy // Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 2006. - P. 213-234. Neyer G., & Andersson G. Consequences of family policies on childbearing behaviour: Effects or artifacts? // Population and Development Review, 2008, 34(4), p. 699-724.

2 Labor market in the Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, 2011, p.22

In relation to the childbearing contingent there are differences in maintaining active employment status that can be explained by common regularities for different countries, including the Republic of Moldova (*Fig.1*). Thus, in younger age groups (15-24/25-34 years old) women usually stay longer in the family, start work later and namely these age periods are those for marriage, birth and taking care of the first children. Meanwhile, more women than men interrupt their business activity or leave the labor market to care for children of preschool age.

Besides, according to statistics with respect to the childbearing contingent included in the age group 20-49 (*Fig.2*), the employment rate is significantly lower for women with at least one child of preschool age (37.2% in 2011) compared with women who have no children of this age (about 53%) and has been continuously declining in recent years. The division by gender highlights that employment indicators are higher for men in the category of persons with at least one child of preschool age (over 19% compared to women), and is reversed in favor of women for people who do not have any children of preschool age.



(do not have any children of preschool age, have at least one child of preschool age)

Fig.2. The employment rate of 20-49 years old population according to the number of children of preschool age, 2007-2011, (in%)

Source: NBS data

Since the age of 35 years old (*Fig.1*) the share of employed women (53.7%), and their employment rate (59.7% in 2011) is superior to that of men in that age (46.3% and 53.8%), maintaining up to 45-54 with an employment rate of 61.4%. The increase of employment level for these age groups is partially influenced by the return from maternity leave, but also by low incomes of population and the need for the second “supporter” of the family. Women, unlike men, are oriented not so much to a high salary, but to a more stable job, concentrating, thus, in the official employment providing at least minimum safeguards or social facilities.

Sharing the specific of the CIS countries concerning the relatively high presence of women on the labor market, in the Republic of Moldova, although official statistics do not present structured data on the number of children, employability of women prevails both among those who gave birth and among those who did not. Placed between the family, parental and productive, public professional roles and responsibilities, both in the official statistics, but also in specific empirical studies, it may be observed that women are generally subject to a double load and this is particularly acute, especially for women of working age. This affirmation is also justified by the particularities of the employment of women interviewed, active on the labor market. Thus, with reference to basic jobs over 69% of respondents employed have a full 8-hour work day and more, and among mothers with one or more children this schedule is specific to over 73%. Furthermore, among respondents employed, regardless of the number of children, we notice a high share of those working supplementary outside work, about 1/3³. This load accepted by women is not a choice in favor of the career but rather an al-

3 Study “Women’s reproductive behavior in Chișinău: characteristics and determinant factors”, 2009, Demography sector, IIESP of the ASM

ternative to increase the family budget and cover consumption and maintenance expenses.

Rallying to the foreign researchers' opinion⁴, but also to the empirical results, we find that childbirth reduces women's economic activity: the share of women employed full time decreases once they had / have a child of preschool age to care for (62.2%). It is seen, however, that most women are not oriented towards economic inactivity during child rearing; part time and flexible working hours become an alternative in combining productive and maternal roles for about 20% of respondents. We can not state, however, that the sector of activity, in this case, is a formal one. Related to the studied childbearing contingent, we observe the following: the greater the number of children in the family, the smaller the share of women continuing their professional activity and the larger the share of housewives.

What is also specific for other states is the fact that if the woman with one child manages to combine the maternal role with the productive one under flexible conditions, then the presence of two or more children makes this more difficult to achieve, despite the fact that in some countries are provided considerable benefits for parents with three or more children. Therefore many women, particularly in low-income population categories, for whom the care and education of children become inaccessible, prefer to withdraw from the labor market (*Fig.3*).

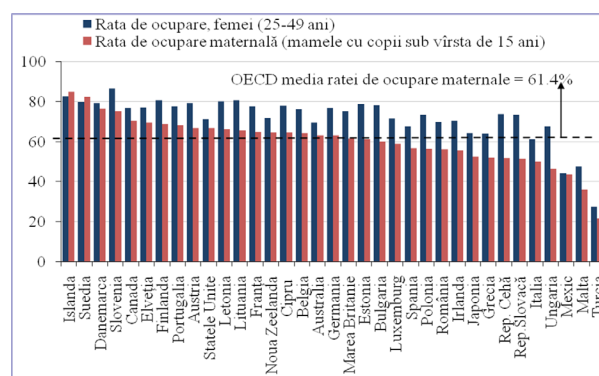


Fig.3. Employment rate of mothers with children under age 15 compared to that of women (25-49 years), 2008

Source: OECD Family database, http://www.oecd.org/document/4/0,3746,en_2649_34819_37836996_1_1_1_1,00.html

The increase in the share of women employed is closely related to the increase in the number of mothers that (re) entered the labor market or remained to be active at work. On average in OECD countries, in 2008, more than six out of ten women with dependent children (0-16 years old) were active in the remunerated labor market. However, significant transnational variations are evident. Thus, below the 50% employment rate for mothers with children aged 0-16, at the lower limit among European countries we find Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the Slovak Republic. At the other end, where two out of three mothers with dependent children are employed, we see the northern countries Iceland and Sweden, with a maternal employment rate of over 80%.

National differences in the period of parental leave after birth have their contribution to orienting occupational behavior of mothers. Thus, in many countries, according to Western statistics⁵, maternal employment rate decreases when children are 3-5 years old (*Fig. 4*) and goes

4 Human Development Report for the Russian Federation in 2008. Moscow, 2009. p. 139-143; Shakhotko, L. The birth rate in urban and rural communities: the differences on the background of the general trends. // The electronic version of the bulletin Population and Society, № 393-394, 2009, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2009/0393/tema06.php>

5 Doing better for families, OECD, 2011, p.36

up with the increase in age of the youngest child: thus, for women whose youngest child is no more than five years old, the employment rate is about 60%; between 6 and 11 years old - 69.7%, 12-14 years old - 73.5%. It is worthwhile mentioning that these factors have an insignificant influence on the level of employment of men and usually increases when the child goes to school. The dynamics of the relationship with the labor market of women with children varies significantly from country to country. For example, in the Netherlands and Switzerland is characteristic the “part-time” hiring of mothers with children under age 5.

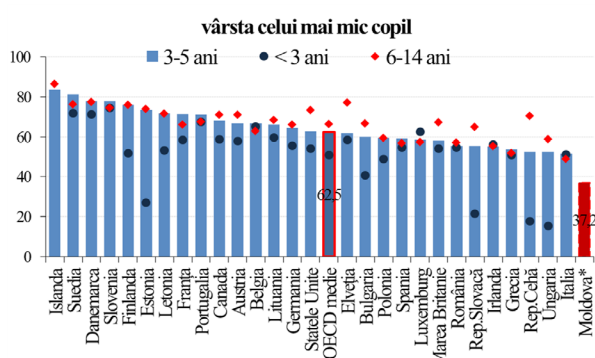


Fig. 4. Employment rate of mothers with children under age 15 by number of children and the age of the smallest child, for some countries, 2008

Source: OECD Family database, http://www.oecd.org/document/4/0,3746,en_2649_34819_37836996_1_1_1_1,00.html

*The NBS data - is shown the employment rate of women aged 20-49 having at least one pre-school age child in 2011.

On the economic activity of women, unlike that of men, influences the number of children of 0-16 years old. Thus, the female employment rate tends to be lower for mothers with a higher number of dependent children (0-16 years old). In 2008, on average for OECD and EU countries, the employment rate of women with one child was

over 71%; with two children - around 67%; with three or more children - up to 50%.

The first childbirth influences little on the economic activity of women, but increases sharply the share of housewives and decreases the number of those doing studies. Russian scientists' studies⁶ show that the birth of the second child reduces the activity of women in the labor market by 4-5%, and the birth of the third or next child - by 16%. At the same time, employed women are more likely than those unemployed to give birth to the first child, while those unemployed – to the second or next child.

The local studies highlight⁷ that if the first childbirth occurs regardless of circumstances, then the desire of an employed women to have the second child depends largely on the economic factors and family welfare in support of that intention. It follows, then, that not only the risk of family poverty pushes the woman with child on the labor market, but also, on the contrary, the expectation of some losses in connection with the birth of a (another) child may impede the procreative intentions.

Nowadays women combine in a different way family, children and job. Reflecting and based on research results, we observe that more than half of respondents (57%) have an “egalitarian” vision in their choice, claiming that for the contemporary woman family and job are equally important. One third of respondents are adherents of the traditional perception of the role of women, giving importance to family and only 2.6% think that the professional activity now takes the place of family.

According to empirical studies, in their life projects, women support particularly a bal-

6 Human Development Report for the Russian Federation in 2008. Moscow, 2009. p. 139.

7 Study „Women's reproductive behavior in Chișinău: characteristics and determinant factors”, 2009, Demography sector, IIESP of the ASM

anced and fair combination of family, parental and professional roles. It stands out an important feature of occupational behavior of women - for most of them leaving the labor market in connection with childbirth is not definitive, and involvement and active labor market position becomes a priority for women. Thus, directly related to stages of family life whose path is guided by birth, rearing and education of kid(s) only few of the respondents (on average about 6%) claim that “women should not work outside the home”. At the same time, they opt rather for a part-time work program when caring for a child of preschool age (70.2%) or when the youngest child goes to school (57.7%), than total abandonment of work, desiring the continuity of their position in the labor market. The same occupational orientation is seen for women regardless of whether they have or not children (*Fig.5*). We notice that if until the appearance of the first child and after the kids grow up women prefer a full and active involvement in professional life, then, with becoming a mother during the period of growth and schooling of children the woman maintains the wish to remain employed in the labor market, but on a part-time schedule.

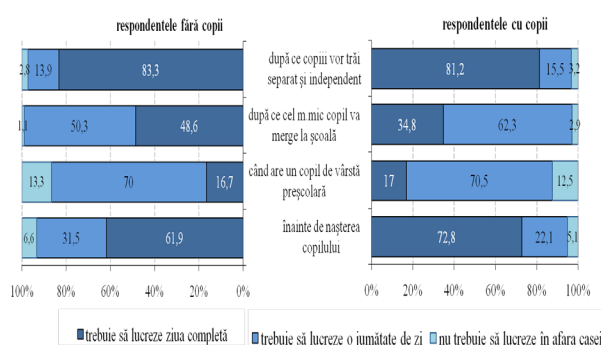


Fig.5. Distribution of respondents views on women's work schedule (in %)

Source: Study “Women's reproductive behavior in Chișinău: characteristics and determinant factors”, 2009, Demography sector, IIESP of the ASM

A factor that facilitates the reconciliation of problems related to professional activity and family life is low flexibility of employment schedules. The respondents with kid(s) perceive more acutely than those without children the need for a flexible schedule, including in the period of children schooling (62.3%), which is explained by the role of maternal experience, knowledge of the peculiarities of this period, the difficulties of balancing family, parental and professional roles.

In this context, both from the study results and the synthesis of statistical data, we find that the occupational preferences of women in the labor market depend very much on the presence of preschool and school age children. Also, according to the annual Labor Force Survey (NBS)⁸ it may be seen that women are opting for a different work schedule than men. Thus, because of family responsibilities, every eighth woman of working age (about 14%) prefers a part-time job, while the share of men opting for such a schedule is only 2%. Every fifth woman would not like to have a full-time job. If men prefer to stay at least five hours overtime per week, thinking about a possible promotion, then women do not like to stay longer than three hours a week. Every fifth woman would accept yet to work more than 40 hours per week, but only because of the desire to earn more.

In the Republic of Moldova, the labor legislation norms are oriented towards adjustment to the EU legal standards. Thus, the Labor Code establishes certain guarantees and facilities in the workplace in connection with pregnancy and maternity⁹ referring in particular to create a more favorable regime of work and rest for women that would allow them to combine more efficiently the fulfillment of job and family-

⁸ Women and men in the labor market in the Republic of Moldova. Analytical Report. – NBS, Chișinău, 2010.

⁹ Labor Code of the Republic of Moldova, Title X, Chapter II „Labor of women, persons with family obligations and others”.

parental responsibilities¹⁰. The legislature grants the strongest protective safeguards to pregnant women and mothers with children younger than 3 years old. Domestic studies indicate that the most common workplace facilitation for this category of women is flexible working schedule (about 2/3 of respondents). Far fewer women, about a fifth received financial aid because they had kid(s) requiring care and additional paid breaks for feeding the baby.

By the subsequent evaluation of the complementary results of the attitude towards woman's position and behavior in the labor market, the majority of them prefer the economic reasons and the need for the second breadwinner, and not the desire to make a career. We believe also that the high share of women with active employment status among those who have children, and their views in favor of an active labor market presence of the mother with a preschool age child, might be the result of very small allowances offered for children that, in fact, do not compensate for the loss of a monthly employment income.

As for the Republic of Moldova, it is seen that high career requirements are listed on a secondary position to the financial problems and shortcomings. According to the research findings, the justification of the own attitude towards professional activity relates primarily to the economic aspect of the family being a source of income for 74.8% of respondents. The professional activity becomes a means of self-fulfillment and autonomy for 41% and for about 38% - an opportunity to obtain financial independence. With the increase in the number of children, through the involvement in the labor field women claim, primarily, the need for a sig-

nificant additional income to support the family. Rationalizing on the motivation justifying the involvement into the labor market of the woman who has a child of preschool age, about 2/3 of respondents equally emphasize the "financial and material shortcomings". Much lower, but significant values are assigned to: desire to have the "own" money (about 39%), satisfaction and interest in work (25.7%), and finally, the need to accumulate work experience (23.3%). Without deviating from the upper position assigned to economic problems, with the increase in the level of education of respondents, rises, as well, the share of motivation towards the interest in the job and the desire of financial independence.

Today, according to statistical data women with higher and secondary vocational education have a significant potential on the labor market. Research in the field¹¹ demonstrate that women with a higher level of education are often more likely to delay childbearing until they have finished studies and begun a career.

Nowadays, the interdependence between the woman's decision to work or to give birth to a (another) child is evident. And it is not that economically employed women refuse to have children, but it is rather that women with birth plans have certain expectations and fears about the withdrawal period from the formal area of paid labor. We would like to mention that while planning the birth of the second child, the correlation of these factors is extremely important. At the same time, the conflict between the active employment status of women and childbirth and child rearing is maintained also by the limited access to services (institutions) of preschool children care and education, and lack of real control

10 For example, such rules as: establishment at the request of pregnant women and parents of young children, of a privileged work schedule, limiting and banning the sending in a business trip and assigning additional work, establishing additional paid breaks for feeding children, privileged order for granting ordinary holidays etc.

11 Human Development Report for the Russian Federation in 2008. Moscow, 2009. p. 140; Shakhotko, L. The birth rate in urban and rural communities: the differences on the background of the general trends. // The electronic version of the bulletin Population and Society, № 393-394, 2009, <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2009/0393/tema06.php>

for ensuring their rights in employment. In this context, we assume that in the implementation of the demographic program oriented inclusively to boost birth rate, the target - group should become the women employed in the labor market with a special emphasis laid on the issue of compatibility boundaries between the roles of mother and employee both competing for women's time and forces. Another direction of incentive policies is also creating opportunities for part-time work, flextime, home working, etc. for women with young children, and as well investing in

developing alternative social services of the care and education of children and access to them. This would allow, first of all, keeping women in the labor market, which is very important in the conditions of population aging and reduction of active labor force; secondly, providing the family with additional source of income – a valuable condition for the women procreative decisions, but also for the period of raising and educating children; thirdly, combining more efficiently and successfully the maternal, paternal role with other activities and roles of women.

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